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DETECTIVE FRANK'S FULL FLUSH.

BY CHARLES MORRIS.



RAISING HIS HEAD, FRANK PEERED AT THE IRATE ROGUE, WHO WAS GAZING INTENTLY AT THE WALL, AND SWEARING VIGOROUSLY TO HIMSELF.

Detective Frank's Full Flush;

OR,

DODGER AGAINST DODGER.

BY CHARLES MORRIS.

CHAPTER I.

A CHANCE AT THE DODGER.

"I TELL you, Dick, he is a good bit the heaviest weight I ever tried to carry. It's a disgrace to our profession that we can't handle him; but we can't, that's the long and short of it."

"Never say can't. Don't the Good Book tell you that? We haven't climbed all the hills yet, Joe; nor seen through all the holes."

"If you can see through the Artful Dodger you must have a six barreled microscope in each eye, that's all I've got to say. He's a whole team, and a little dog under the wagon."

These words passed between two men who were seated in an office room in the city of New York. The room was a large one, with a table desk in the center, well covered with papers, a cabinet against the wall with pigeon-holes stuffed full of documents, and a number of cane-seat chairs.

The walls displayed an odd attempt at ornament, being hung with pictures of noted criminals, scenes of burglary and crime, and other extracts from the life of the law-breakers—most of them newspaper illustrations, which were tacked up at intervals around the room.

The two men were negligently dressed, one of them leaning back in his chair, with his feet on the table and a pipe in his mouth, while the one named Joe sat with both elbows on the table, and with a look of vexation on his face.

On a lounge at one side of the room lay a well-grown boy, to all appearance asleep, though closer observation would have shown that not a word of the conversation escaped him.

At the last remark he stirred, rose on one elbow, and said in a drawing tone:

"Maybe he's a whole team, but I reckon I'm the little dog under the wagon. That's me!"

"Dry up, youngster," growled the man named Dick. "We'll whistle for you when we want a pup of your size."

"Me a pup!" cried the boy indignantly. "I'm the bull-dog of the Bowery, and don't you forget it."

With these words he fell back on the lounge, closed his eyes, and in a moment seemed fast asleep again.

The two men laughed.

"More of the bloodhound than of the bull-dog, I fancy," inferred the man who was leaning on the table.

"With a cross of the rat-terrier," suggested the other.

The first speaker now picked up a newspaper, opened it, and leaned back in his chair to read, while the other addressed himself to puffing out whirling clouds of smoke from his pipe.

Thus some five minutes passed. Then the silence was broken by a loud whistle from the man with the paper.

"Jupiter!" he cried. "Here's nuts!" and he struck the table a blow that made its papers dance.

"Hillo!" cried Dick, taking the pipe hastily from his mouth, "what snake's bit you?"

"A rattler, by jingo!" exclaimed the boy, springing suddenly from the lounge.

"Slow down. Shut off steam. There isn't any dynamite in it," rejoined Joe. "Struck a little snag, that's all. Listen to this advertisement, Dick."

Opening the paper again, he turned to the column of "Wants," and read as follows:

"WANTED—A boy from fifteen to eighteen years of age, quick-witted and quick motioned, none others need apply. For messenger and general utility service. Call, 3 to 5 P. M. Wednesday, at 468 Bronson street."

"Well?" queried Dick.

"He's the Artful himself! That's his number. He want a messenger! What for?"

"To run messages, I should say," rejoined Dick.

"See here, Dick: do you know what struck me when I read that?"

"An idea, I suppose," replied the other. "They are all the time striking you, but none of them get in."

He put the pipe to his lips again, and drew a long whiff.

"You're too confoundedly smart," retorted Joe, in a pet. "See here, now! For three years we have been trying to get on the track of this Clarkson. In that time we have reason to think he has been mixed in a dozen crimes, burglaries, counterfeiting, and even murder, yet not an ounce of sure evidence have we got against him. The cute rascal has dodged the whole detective force of New York so neatly that he has well earned the title of the Artful Dodger."

"Bless your heart, Joe, that's no news. Tell me something new. What's the idea this time?"

"He wants a messenger-boy; spry, ready, quick-witted; why not send him the bull-dog of the Bowery?"

"Whew! that is an idea!"

"Jolly for you! I'm your chap!" cried the boy, dancing with excitement. "Put me in his house, and if there's anything crooked in it, I'll find it out or collapse. I ain't the bull-dog of the Bowery any more; I'm the rat-terrier of the Elevated; I'm the premium ferret of the Underground. Put my nose on his trail, and I'll run him to his hole or burst."

"By Jove, I believe you will!" remarked Dick, looking with admiration on the acute and intelligent countenance of the boy, and his excitement at the very suggestion of detective work.

Said boy, Frank Melton by name, was a well-built and strongly-framed youth, of somewhere from sixteen to eighteen years of age, neatly dressed and seemingly well-cared for, and of a good-looking and clean-cut face. He was evidently excitable and ready-witted, and the keen look in his eyes indicated that he was adapted by nature to his present occupation, that of aid and assistant to the detectives, Richard Wister and Joseph Smith.

"Joe, I forgive you," continued Dick. "Your ideas have led me into many a bramble-bush; but this looks like one that won't scratch. I forgive you."

"Genius always gets recognized, if it waits long enough," rejoined Joe, with a sigh of satisfaction. "I have not quite wasted my talents.—But come, joking aside: what do you think of sending Frank to apply for that situation?"

"Joking aside, I think very well of it. There is nothing like getting behind the breastworks of the enemy. You know what you've got to do, Frank?"

"Yes," answered the boy curtly.

"What?"

"First, to try for the situation."

"Very good. What next?"

"To get it."

"If you can."

"If I can? There ain't no if about it."

"Well—what after?"

"General utility," responded Frank. "I'm to keep my eyes and ears open, slip around like a ferret, peek here and peer there, see everything and say nothing, be as innocent as a dove and as sharp as a hawk—and when I strike anything shady fetch it straight to you."

"The boy don't need any instructions, Dick," declared Joe.

"Not he. He's got the idea."

"Wednesday—that's to-morrow. Three to five P. M. You know what P. M. means?"

"Yes. Past munching. After dinner."

"Be there as soon after three as you can. The early bird catches the worm. He will probably want references. Give him these names as your last employers. I'll see that they are posted as to your value and virtue."

Joe, as he spoke, wrote down two names and addresses, which he handed to the boy.

"All O. K. and P. M.," assented Frank. "I'm going to get that situation. Maybe I'm running my head into a hornet's nest, for the Artful ain't the sort of chap to try tricks on. If I get into trouble, I want you to help me out of it."

"That we'll do. We expect to keep track of the Dodger. If you get into chancery, we'll be on the other side of the wall. But you must play deuced sly. When you come to us to report, see that you are not tracked. He might put a spy on you."

"I'll do my prettiest, you can bet high on that."

A conversation of considerable length followed, in which more exact and definite directions were given to the youthful scout.

He listened respectfully, though not without some show of impatience, as if he felt that no instructions were necessary in his case.

"Enough said," he at length broke out. "There's nothing wanted but a sharp eye, a still tongue, and a cat tread. If I can run him to his hole—"

"We'll be on hand to trap him."

"Just you stick to that. Don't leave him to trap me. Good-by. I'm going to have that situation, or—subside."

Seizing his hat, he set it rakishly on his head, and swaggered out of the room, followed by the laughter of the detectives.

Promptly at three o'clock of the next afternoon, the young detective spy presented himself at the door of 468 Bronson street. He found a number of boys there ahead of him, whom he closely observed, weighing their chances of the situation.

"There won't be any of these chaps take the wind out of my sails," he said to himself. "They're all of the half-baked sort. The Artful don't want no grown-up infants."

The bell being rung, the applicants were admitted, and shown into a room on one side of the hall, whence they were called one by one by the woman who had admitted them, for an interview with her employer.

Frank hung back, not caring to be the first examined. He wanted Mr. Clarkson first to be disgusted with some of the dead wood surrounding him before showing his mettle.

After half a dozen had been called out and dismissed, Frank decided that his turn had come, and pressed forward so obtrusively that the woman beckoned to him next. He followed her briskly, and was led to a room across the hall, where he found himself before a well-dressed person seated negligently in an easy-chair.

Frank observed him with the critical eye of the born detective. It was no part of his role to play the shy or modest youth. He felt sure that that was not the kind of boy wanted. He saw before him a gentlemanly individual, of a smooth and not unhandsome face, with a marked benevolence of expression. Yet the keen-eyed boy saw more in the countenance than he could readily fathom—a shadow of a character different from that which the face wore as a mask.

"He's a wolf in a lamb's hide. I'll bet my pile on that," decided Frank.

The gentleman looked at him closely.

"What is your name, my boy?" he asked in a quiet tone.

"Frank Melton."

"Where do you reside?"

Frank gave his address, which the questioner jotted down.

"What can you do?"

"Everything."

"Mercy on us, here is an Admirable Crichton! What do you know?"

"Nothing—except what I'm wanted to know. Knows nothing and can do everything! A promising youth, indeed! Can you find your way about New York?"

"With my eyes shut, at midnight."

"And if sent on an errand, can you perform it promptly and correctly?"

"Try me. That's the proof of the pudding."

The questioner now looked the boy over from head to foot, with eyes that seemed to be in every detail of his organization.

"If I should engage you, when could you come?"

"I could stay now, if you said the word."

"Good. Have you been in service before?"

"Yes, sir. Here are my references."

He handed him the written list which he had received from Joe Smith. The gentleman looked over them.

"I like you, boy. You seem wide-awake, and that's what I want. Here are four letters to be delivered. Take them to their addresses, and let me see how soon and how well you can do it. There will be an answer in each case."

Frank put on his hat and took the letters, looking at the addresses.

"Good-day, sir!" he said; "here's to proving the pudding." And he was off.

CHAPTER II.

THE FOUR QUEER VISITORS.

At an afternoon hour of the next day Frank Melton met the detective, Dick Wister, in the street.

"I told you I'd do it," he cried in triumph.

"I've got the situation."

"Good for you, Frank. I judged you'd manage it. What salary do you get?"

"Four dollars a week and grub."

"And what are you to do?"

"Run errands, tend door, keep up fires, help in the kitchen, and about everything else."

"That looks like small pay for big work. Don't let him crowd you too much."

"I'll hold up my end, now you bet! I reckon my pay's to go on with you?"

"Yes, if your work goes on. We'll pay you for all the useful news you bring in."

"Here's the first installment," said Frank, tak-

ing a paper from his pocket. "I carried letters yesterday to these four individuals, and brought back answers."

Dick cast his eye over the paper.

"All strangers. Must look them up. That's a good idea, Frank. Keep us posted in all things, big and small."

"Won't I? I'll write you every time the cat squalls. You write me to my home address if you've got any orders. It isn't safe for me to come to the office."

"That's it exactly. Clarkson is not the sort to play with."

"You bet he ain't! Outside he's just as smooth and sweet as new milk, but he's awful deep. I've been trying to look into him, but I can't see half way to the bottom. And I wouldn't like to stir him up too much for fear of waking an earthquake."

"I know him. A soft and smiling rascal. And knows better how to cover up his tracks than any Indian scout. Now, scoot away, youngster, you're loafing on your employer."

Frank burst into a merry laugh, and darted off without answering. Dick Wister stood looking after him.

"Frank will make his mark yet. He has the detective instinct strong. It was a stroke of genius to put him on Clarkson's trail," Dick's thoughts took form.

Meanwhile the boy was making rapid way toward his new home, seeking to recover the time he had lost in his chat with the detective. He was too early in service yet to play the laggard. Reaching the Bronson street mansion he reported the result of his errand to Mr. Clarkson.

"Very well. Now you may go down in the kitchen and help the cook. If anybody calls tell them that I am out. I will not be back till evening."

"Cook's aid-de-camp! I didn't hire for that," growled Frank when out of hearing. "When you get out of doors I'm going to take a peep round this shanty. I reckon that's more in my line than paring potatoes and polishing frying-pans."

As the boy retreated Mr. Clarkson put on his spring overcoat, took his hat and cane, and walked out with a steady, solid step, like that of a man who owns a good slice of the earth. He looked the retired merchant or gentleman of leisure, rather than the criminal at large and "Artful Dodger," as the detectives named him.

Frank was too acute to begin his investigation at once. He did not know but that the cook might be questioned as to his doings, and therefore went to the kitchen as ordered.

But an hour sufficed to finish his labors there, and then he slipped into the front portion of the house, and began to wander about in a listless fashion, as if moved only by idle curiosity. He instinctively distrusted everything and every person about that house.

But lazy as his feet seemed, the boy's eyes were kept very busy, and nothing escaped his alert glance. The house he found to be a large one, with a central hall, having a large and handsomely furnished parlor on one side, and two rooms on the other. Of these the front one was fitted up as library and office, its desk standing unlocked, and stuffed full of papers.

"Nothing there," observed Frank, shrugging his shoulders. "That's just like the Artful. Wears an open countenance, he does; as innocent as an angel outside, but with a good deal of the devil hid away. It isn't there I'd look for anything shady."

Taking the best of care to touch nothing, Frank left the room and leisurely ascended the stairs. On the second floor he found a large sitting-room in the rear, with a bay window back. A center table occupied the middle of the apartment, with writing materials and newspapers. Several handsome chairs and sofas furnished the room, which also contained a cabinet of bric-a-brac, a marble mantel clock, and other ornaments.

A glance took in the room, and then the boy sought the front region of the house. Here were several bedrooms, the large front one being evidently that of Mr. Clarkson himself.

It was tastefully furnished, and looked like the apartment of a gentleman of wealth. In one corner was a small fire-proof safe. On this Frank fixed his eyes covetously. Who could tell what deep and valuable secrets it might contain?

The third floor he had no occasion to visit. It contained his own bedroom and those of the two servants who made up the working force of the family.

But there remained the cellar and the yard.

Here no secrets were likely to lurk, but Frank believed in thorough work.

The cellar was a long, cemented, dry room, with furnace and coal bins in front, a wine closet on one side, and food shelves and safes in the rear.

The yard extended some distance back, with a square grass plot in the center, and a grape arbor, from which supports for the vine extended to a shed over the kitchen door.

This survey consumed considerable time, for the youthful scout let nothing escape his observation, while he took the best of care to touch nothing, not knowing what trap for curiosity his astute master might have set.

His work done he seated himself in a chair in the yard, with his feet upon the grape-arbor post, and reflected.

"The whole house is just as innocent as an angel," he said to himself. "Nothing crooked high nor low. And the Artful is a born cherub. He couldn't do a thing wrong, on account of his tender conscience. Oh, he's a perfect daisy, he is!"

"But when the bull-dog of the Bowery gets his teeth in he don't let go easy. I bet high he'll fetch blood yet. John P. Clarkson, Esquire, ain't quite a spring lamb nor a pet dove if he does show such pretty ways. I reckon he's a good deal of the fox and a little of the wolf."

"Ye're takin' life purty tender and 'asy, me boy," cried the cook from the kitchen at this juncture. "Wouldn't ye like a pipe o' baccy and a glass o' poteen, avick?"

"Anything that's handy. Don't disturb yourself, Bridget."

"Faix, I won't that; but I've got a cruel desire to disturb you. Here's the knives I bid ye to scour, and purtily scoured they are."

"Oh, if that's all, I'll do it in two shakes of a cat's tail. Let me have them. I'd stand on my head all day to accommodate you, Biddy."

"Would ye now? I'm afraid ye'd git a rush o' blood to the head sooner that way than with hard work."

"Maybe so," said Frank, laughing. "At any rate, you'll soon see me make looking-glasses of your knife-blades. I'm running over with elbow grease."

"And ain't wantin' in tongue 'ile, I be thinkin'," retorted Biddy.

Frank had evidently already got on the best of terms with the autocrat of the kitchen, and as he rubbed diligently away at the knife-blades, whistling and singing at intervals, she beamed upon him with satisfaction.

"What's the bill of fare to-night, Biddy?"

"Lamb chops and hot biscuit. The master won't be in, so we'll have our little smack to ourselves."

"I reckon I'll have to put up with it, but it ain't the kind of grub I'm used to."

"It ain't then!" cried Biddy, with a burst of wrath. "Faix, and what has your lordship been used to, if I might be so bold as to ask? Nothin' better nor pigs' trotters and salt mackerel, I'll be bound."

"You're a born prophet, Biddy," rejoined Frank, laughing. "Fetch along your chops and biscuit as soon as you've a mind. I could eat fried railroad spikes on a pinch."

"Could ye, indade? Don't try it on, avick, or I might have to sell ye for ould iron."

Thus rattling on Frank enjoyed his supper hugely, and helped Bridget, and Sarah the chambermaid, in their duties of "clearing up."

By the time this was at an end Mr. Clarkson returned. The first sound of his key in the door put a stop to the clatter in the kitchen. When he walked in all was moving with mouse-like smoothness and quietness.

"Frank!" he called.

"Sir," answered the boy, hastening into the hall.

"I expect four gentlemen to call on me to-night. I wish you to attend to the bell, as I have given the girls a night out. When they come, show them up to the sitting-room. And remember, I am not at home to any one else."

"I'll not forget, Mr. Clarkson."

"You know what 'Not at home' means?"

"Oh, yes! It means a lie, dressed up in the overcoat of truth."

"Good!" cried Mr. Clarkson, breaking into a laugh. "You'll do, boy. You don't need any lessons."

He walked up-stairs, still laughing.

"Not from you," said Frank to himself, looking after him. "I've got my eye-teeth pretty well cut, Mr. Artful Dodger."

Frank turned away, thinking deeply. He had taken letters the day before to four persons. Four were to call to-night, and nobody else to be admitted. The women-servants were

dismissed for the night. Was there some rascality afoot? It looked that way, and he quietly made up his mind that he was not going to sleep through it. It was his first job of real detective work, and now was the time to show what stuff was in him.

At eight o'clock the two women, having finished their work, went out. Frank seated himself on a chair in the hall, waiting for the expected tinkle of the bell. At half-past eight it came.

Opening the door, he saw before him a tall, stout personage, heavily bearded, and with his hat well drawn down over his face, as if to hide his countenance.

"Is Mr. Clarkson in?"

"Yes, sir. Walk in."

Frank closed the door and led the way to the sitting-room, on whose portal he rapped loudly. Mr. Clarkson quickly opened.

"Good-evening! Walk in," to the visitor. Then turning to Frank he remarked, pleasantly: "When the other gentlemen come you may send them up. They know the way."

"All right, sir," and Frank retreated.

Ten minutes passed, and then came another ring. On opening the door Frank was confronted by a seedy-looking individual, his well-worn coat buttoned to his throat, as if to hide the absence of a shirt, the ragged brim of his soft hat flapping over his face.

The boy's first impulse was to tell him there was no cold victuals to-night, for he could not imagine this to be one of the expected visitors.

"Is Mr. Clarkson, in?" were the words that met his ears.

He stared in surprise.

"You ain't one of—" he began, but checked himself. "Wait a minute; I'll see if he's in."

Glancing hastily round, to see if there were any valuables within reach, Frank ran up the stairs, leaving the visitor standing in the hall.

He rapped again at the sitting-room door. Mr. Clarkson appeared, this time with a show of vexation in his face.

"Didn't I tell you to send the other gentlemen up?" he demanded.

"Just so," responded Frank.

"Then what brings you here?"

"You said gentlemen. You didn't say a word about tramps. This one's a genuine cold victualer, one of the sort that sleeps in barns, and keeps one eye squinted for dogs."

"Send him up," rejoined Mr. Clarkson, with a laugh. "And don't trouble me again. If the other two are citizens it will answer. You needn't be particular about gentlemen."

"All O. K. You're the doctor," thought Frank, as he descended the stairs.

"You'll find him up there," he said to the visitor, pointing with his thumb. "We keep the cold pieces in the second-story, back."

Without a word of response the seedy visitor ascended the stairs, leaving Frank again alone on guard. He whistled in surprise.

"I wonder what sort of a candidate the next one will be?" he queried.

He had not long to wait to discover, for the bell tinkled again within five minutes. Frank opened the door with some curiosity, but fell back a step on seeing the form before him.

For it was an individual with a coppery complexion and dressed in the white blouse of the Chinaman—to all appearance a genuine representative of the Celestial kingdom.

"How d'ye do, John? Fetch home the dickies!" asked Frank.

"Mista Clarkson—him in?" asked the caller.

"You don't mean to say you're one of them?"

"Mista Clarkson—him in?" repeated John.

"Well, I'll be fiddled! Plant yourself right there, and I'll see;" and, leaving the Celestial on the door-step, Frank again ascended the stairs and knocked at the sitting-room door.

Mr. Clarkson's face grew red with anger on seeing him.

"Are you a born fool?" he ejaculated. "Didn't I tell you to send up my visitors without troubling me?"

"You told me to send up gentlemen and citizens. There wasn't a word said about such half-cocked specimens as this."

"What do you mean, boy?"

Frank turned and whistled.

"Glide up here, John, and show your handsome phiz," he called out.

In response the Chinaman ascended the stairs. "Look at that!" demanded Frank indignantly. "A snub nose, coffee-colored, rub-rub John Chinaman. You don't call that sort of cross-eyed coon a citizen?"

Mr. Clarkson's anger disappeared, and he could not help laughing again at the boy's indignation.

"You are a little hard to please, my young friend," he said. "Send up the next, if he is a man. That ought to be broad enough to suit you." And he shut the door, after admitting the Chinaman.

"Well, if these ain't sweet samples of dime-museum freaks, I'll be shot!" remarked Frank, as he descended the stairs. "Lucky there's only one more of them, or I'd throw up my situation on the spot. A fellow's got to draw a line somewhere."

He now waited some ten minutes, at the end of which time the bell very feebly tinkled.

"A weak-wristed freak, this one," thought Frank, as he again opened the door.

He stared at the personage before him in more surprise than ever. What he saw was a short, spare specimen of humanity, with a very thin, peaked face, and hawk-like nose, while a pair of luxuriant side-whiskers, of reddish hue, descended half way to his waist. His eyes peered out oddly from under the rim of a queer shaped cap, that was drawn down over half his face. A blue cloak, edged with fur, was wrapped closely round his form.

He rattled off something to Frank in a foreign dialect that sounded like sheer gibberish to the disgusted boy.

"What do you want?" demanded Frank, sharply.

The strange personage again jabbered earnestly, the only words Frank could understand being "Mista Clarkson."

"Want to see Mr. Clarkson? Is that it?"

The visitor nodded energetically.

Frank looked at him with dubious eyes, and then at the stairs. In a minute he made up his mind. He caught the visitor by the shoulder and pulled him in, closing the door behind him. Then he shut the vestibule door, leaving him between the two doors.

"I reckon you're safe there," he grumbled, as he ascended the stairs for the fourth time.

He knocked very sharply this time on the sitting-room door. Mr. Clarkson quickly responded, and on seeing the boy again, sprung angrily toward him, as if with intent to kick him down stairs.

"Don't," protested Frank. "I might hurt it if I'd fall on it."

"Hurt it? What?"

"The thing down there."

"What do you mean, booby? Didn't I tell you send him up this time if he was a man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why didn't you?"

"Because it ain't a man."

"Then what is it?"

"That's where you've got me. It's a what-is-it. Some sort of a cross between a baboon and a kangaroo. I've got it caged down there." He pointed mysteriously downward.

"What does the fool mean?" cried Mr. Clarkson, descending the stairs hastily, his expression now divided between anger and amusement.

He threw open the vestibule door and released Frank's prisoner.

"Well, this is rich!" he ejaculated, but laughing outright. In a moment he suppressed his mirth, and spoke to the visitor in the same language which had so perplexed the boy.

He now led the caller up stairs, and ushering him into the sitting-room, turned to Frank with a face full of suppressed amusement.

"You're something of a judge of human nature, boy," he declared. "But, bear this in mind: if you disturb me again, I'll be tempted to break your neck. Now take your station in the hall, and see that no one else is admitted. I am not at home to any one, you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"That will do, then." Mr. Clarkson re-entered the sitting-room and shut the door behind him. Frank heard the lock click sharply.

"Wouldn't I give something to have Joe and Dick here now!" said the boy to himself. "The Artful Dodger's wide-awake to-night. And you bet the rat-terrier of the Underground ain't fast asleep!"

CHAPTER III.

A PEEP AT A MYSTERY.

FRANK certainly had no intention of going to sleep. Never in his life had he been more wide-awake. That something mysterious was going on in that closed room there could be no question. Something criminal, perhaps. The boy was eaten up with curiosity.

But how to get at the secret? The key-hole was of no use, that he quickly discovered, for the key had been left in it. There was nothing available but the bay-window at the rear of the sitting room. Could he, in any way, get a glance through this?

Frank lost no time in passing through the kitchen into the yard. He could see that the curtains of the bay-window were pulled well down, though raised sufficiently at one sash to let out a bright ray of light. This sash was lifted several inches for ventilation.

The hed over the kitchen door came up to within some four feet of the bottom of the windows. If he could get on that shed!

He looked about him. The supports of the grape-vine arbor? No, they were too weak. He shook his head.

Against the fence stood a step-ladder, considerably too short to reach the edge of the shed. But a broad work-table stood against the outer wall of the house.

The astute boy was not long in putting this and that together. Lifting the table as quietly as possible, he set it under the edge of the shed. Then with equal caution he adjusted the ladder on the table. Eureka! it reached within a foot of the shed.

So much done Frank paused and listened. His operations had evidently been unheard. From under the raised sash there came to his ears the faint sound of voices.

He returned into the house and ascended the stairs. The keyhole was still obstructed and the door evidently locked. No alarm had been taken.

With a look of satisfaction the young scout returned to the yard, where he went to the rear gate, slipped its bolt, and partly opened it.

"The wise general always leaves a way open for retreat," he muttered.

Returning now to the table he noiselessly climbed upon it by the aid of a chair, and then very carefully began the ascent of the somewhat rickety ladder.

No cat ever moved with less noise than did the young detective in this slow ascent. After ascending a few steps of the ladder he was able to steady himself by catching the edge of the shed roof. A step or two more brought him high enough to climb to the roof.

This was done with greater caution than ever. He had to lift his feet from the ladder with great care not to overturn it, while the slightest noise might have reached the ears within.

Fortunately the roof was not steep, and he wormed his way slowly up it, inch by inch, until he came directly beneath the raised sash. The voices now came to him louder than before, but he could distinguish no words.

Reaching upward, he caught the edge of the sash, and lifted himself carefully till he stood upon his feet. He was obliged to remain in a stooping attitude, for if he had stood upright his head would have come a foot up the sash.

Curious as he was for a sight of what was passing within, it was the part of wisdom to move slowly in his dangerous quest, and he paused to listen, with his head just below the window-sill.

Now, by bending his head so as to throw his ear upward, he found himself able to distinguish something of what was being said. He listened intently.

"It is a neat job," came in the voice of Mr. Clarkson. "Vanilli is an artist, that I must acknowledge."

Other voices answered, but their tones were hoarser, and he could not distinguish their words.

"Fine, fine," again exclaimed Mr. Clarkson. "I wouldn't mind dropping some of this proven-dor myself."

"Maybe it'd be wise to give the go-by to the other game and try the old lay. It's mighty promising," came in another voice.

"No, no. I play no games but safe ones, you know that."

For several minutes now the interested listener could hear no more words. Growing impatient at length he ventured to lift his head a little further until his eyes were high enough to look into the room.

The first glance showed him that he was safe, as none of the men were directly facing him, or looking in his direction. The second glance so filled him with astonishment that he came near uttering an exclamation that would have brought his game to a sudden end.

The surprise was well founded. He had looked for a tramp, a Chinaman, and a what-is-it, among the companions of Mr. Clarkson, but what he saw was four gentlemanly-appearing individuals, with scarcely a trace of the persons he remembered. A remarkable transformation had taken place.

The tramp had thrown off his coat and hat, and stood revealed as a well-dressed personage. The Chinaman had shed his nationality with his

blouse and mask, which lay on a table behind him. As for the what-is-it, the removal of the odd hat and the side-whiskers left him as a foreign-looking and narrow-faced, but not un-presentable individual.

Frank would have given a dime to whistle. But, as that was not to be ventured, he relieved his feelings with some strong inward exclamations.

"By the seven jumping jacks, this takes the rag off the shrubbery! Talk about fun! You bet the Artful's chock full of it. But if I don't get a ring in his nose yet, I'll sell out."

The five men, in utter oblivion of this intent observer, were bent over an object which lay on the center of the table around which they stood. They were examining it with the utmost carefulness, and pointing out to each other its excellencies and defects.

But their words had no meaning to the listener. They were talking in a technical language, whose terms were foreign to his ears.

He raised himself higher in an effort to see the object of their observation. All he could make out was a flat, oblong substance, of about an inch in thickness, and, so far as he could tell, made of steel or iron. What it was, he could not decide from its appearance or their words.

One of them now moved around the table into a position to face him, and he ducked his head quickly down for fear of being seen.

"There's nothing more to look at," he thought. "I've seen more than I built on already; what's left is to hear. They'll quit talking Greek after awhile, and get down to plain English, and when they do, I'm here."

But in ten minutes more of this conversation, he failed to understand the few words that reached his ears.

"Come, and I'll show you," at length said Mr. Clarkson, in reply to some inaudible remark. "It is in my office down-stairs."

Frank raised his hand in sudden hope. They were moving toward the door. In a moment the lock clicked, and the door flew open. The five men filed out to the stairs.

"I wonder if the Dodger'll miss me?" questioned the window spy. "Anyhow, I've got to take the chance. I'm in the swim now, and can't go back."

He was bound to know what that thing was over which they had bent so intently, and concerning which they had used such strange language, if he risked his life in learning.

The men were scarcely half-way down the stairs before the daring boy had raised the sash higher, and was lifting himself into the window.

In a minute more he stood on the floor of the room.

His first movement was to glide with a ghost-like tread to the door. The dangerous five were out of sight and hearing, evidently in Mr. Clarkson's office.

Then with a nimble movement he slipped back to the table, and bent with eager curiosity over the object that lay in its center.

An exclamation of surprise and satisfaction broke from his lips.

"By thunder!" he cried, "if I ain't got the Artful Dodger down fine now, there's no snakes! Won't this be nuts for Joe and Dick?"

CHAPTER IV.

A RASCAL-TRAP, AND WHAT IT CAUGHT.

FRANK'S position was very far from being a safe one. Nobody in New York could have told him that better than he knew it himself. That object on the table! If those five men should catch him looking at it, his doom was sealed!

He stood a moment reflecting what to do. Then a thought came to him. On the table beside the object lay a square of thick blotting-paper. Near it was a wide-mouthed pitcher of water. With the quickness of lightning he put this and that together in his brain.

Seizing the blotting-sheet he thrust it into the pitcher until it was saturated with the water. Then withdrawing it, he pressed out the excess liquid between his hands, and laid it flat on the questionable object.

Pressing with all the force of his hands on the blotter, he squeezed it into every crevice of the metallic surface, as a printer presses his paper upon the type. The astute boy was, in technical language, taking a "squeeze" of the suspicious oblong of metal.

This done, he carefully stripped off the blotting-sheet, and thrust it into his pocket, taking care not to disturb its tell-tale record!

Quickly as all this had been done, it had taken some time, and every second now counted. Flight was next on the programme. The boy was on

the point of darting swiftly to the window, when a new thought came into his mind, and a look of vexation on his face.

"A confounded stupid jackass! that's the best word I've got for myself," he muttered. "Why didn't I snatch the whole thing and scoot? Wonder if it's too late, yet?"

He paused to listen. His absorption in his late efforts had partly relaxed his vigilance, and the daring boy was in far greater peril than he dreamed of. For, as he listened, there came to his quick ears the sound of a light step on the stairs very near the top of the flight.

The men were returning! In a second more they would be in the room!

It seemed too late for flight by the window.

Frank's eyes swept the room in a rapid glance. The door opened inward, and left a narrow space between it and the wall, affording a temporary hiding place—the only one he could see.

It was a risky expedient, but it was now a question of life or death. Without a moment's hesitation, the active boy glided noiselessly over the carpet to the wall, and slid like a flash along the latter till he reached the space behind the door.

He was not a moment too soon, for at the instant he vanished behind the door the foot of Mr. Clarkson reached the threshold of the room. The footsteps of his visitors could now be heard closely behind him.

Frank, listening intently from his hiding-place, heard a sudden check to Mr. Clarkson's step, and an exclamation of surprise and alarm from his lips.

"What is that window doing up?" he exclaimed. "It was not raised two inches! Did any of you meddle with it?"

A chorus of dissent came from the others, who were now crowding into the room behind him.

"By heaven, there's something loose here!" he ejaculated, hurrying to the table. "What brings this water here? Who spilt it?"

"None of us," was the answer.

"There's been some one in the room!" cried the black-whiskered man, pushing hastily forward. "Whoever it was, he came and went by that window! By the blue blazes, if I get my five fingers on him—"

He ran rapidly to the window as he spoke, followed by the others.

"There is a ladder outside! The gate is open!" he cried, springing out to the shed.

Mr. Clarkson followed him, while the others pressed up and thrust their heads out in alarmed excitement.

Now was the critical moment for Frank. It need hardly be said that he took hasty advantage of it. Slipping with the agility of a weasel from his covert, two noiseless steps took him to the head of the stairs.

There he checked his impulse to rush downward, stopped, and looked back round the edge of the door.

Of the three men he had last seen, one was stepping out to the roof. The other two were still at the window, with their eyes bent outward.

He could hear the voice of Mr. Clarkson, raised to loud tones. Then came a sudden crash, a fierce curse, and a cry of pain.

"By the jumping Jehosaphat, one of them's tried the ladder, and it's gone down under him! Jolly for me! It's a regular rascal-trap, and I didn't know I was setting it," and the mischievous boy capered for an instant with delight.

The cries outside were followed by curses. The two men at the window stepped back, to allow those outside to re-enter. Frank's time for action had come.

Like a ferret he glided down the stairway. An impulse came into his mind to open the front door and fly for life. But, he knew that if he did so his chance for detective work on the Artful Dodger was at an end. He had learned something, but it was not a tithe of what he hoped for. It might be risky to stay, but it was worth the risk.

He was not long in deciding.

"Nobody suspects me," he said. "They think it was some stranger. But this thing—there'll be the old boy to pay if it's found on me. How'll I get rid of it?"

He was now near the door leading down to the cellar. Opening this he drew the "squeeze" from his pocket and gave it a sharp flip down the cellar stairs. He cared little for the moment where it might go, being satisfied that he could find it without difficulty in the morning.

Barely had the boy disposed of this tell-tale article when voices sounded at the head of the stairway, and steps were heard rapidly descending.

In a second or two more a group of men came rushing back through the hall.

"Confound his awkwardness, he must be badly hurt!" came in the voice of Mr. Clarkson. "Amos always was a headstrong fool."

"I hope to gracious he hasn't broken his neck!" cried the "tramp."

An execration, followed by a groan, from the yard, showed that it was not so bad as that.

Out through the kitchen they rushed, and their voices could soon be heard in the area behind the house.

"What's the outcome, Amos?" asked Mr. Clarkson. "Where is it? Are you hurt bad?"

"Where is it? All over," and a volley of ob-jurgations came from the fallen man's lips.

"What the blazes are you standing there for? After him! He may be just outside the gate."

Two of the men started for the gate at this, but Mr. Clarkson said in a tone of assurance:

"You might as well chase yesterday's wind. The hound that was in that room isn't the sort to hang fire. Get up, Amos. Don't lay there groaning like a stuck pig. I thought you had more grit."

Amos evidently attempted to rise, but fell back with a louder groan than ever.

"Well, why don't you get up?"

"I can't. It's gone," he groaned.

"What's gone?"

"This one. It's got a bad split."

"The devil! A broken leg! That's deuced bad. What's to be done?"

"The first thing's to get me out of this. The next is to send for a doctor. The rascally bone wants to be spliced, and that lively."

"We'll fetch you in," said Mr. Clarkson decisively. "My boy can run for a surgeon. By the way, where is that boy? Frank!"

No response came.

"Frank, I say! Frank!"

Still no answer.

"Where the deuce is he! Ha! can the boy have had anything to do with that ugly job upstairs? I never thought of him. Frank, you sand-snipe, where are you?"

Only the echoes of the house replied.

With a muttered anathema Mr. Clarkson hurried back into the house. The hall was dimly lighted by a turn-down gas-burner. He turned this quickly on to a full blaze, and looked about him suspiciously for the missing boy.

"Frank! Frank, I say! Hillo! here he is, curled up in a corner, and sleeping like a pine knot."

He had just discovered the boy, seated on a chair in a recess beside the cellar door. The chair was tilted back against the wall, and the boy was curled up on it, with his head drooping to one side, and to all appearance lost in deep slumber.

"By Jove, he snoozes finely. Wake up, boy! Wake up, I say!"

Not content with calling him, loudly, Mr. Clarkson shook the seeming sleeper with no light hand.

All he got from him in response was a scund between a snore and a groan.

"Well, this is enough to try Job's patience! Wake up, you young rascal!"

As he spoke he gave the chair a tilt that sent the boy sprawling to the floor. Frank, at this, stretched himself, opened his eyes, and crawled in a dazed way to his feet.

"What's the matter, Biddy?" he demanded.

"What are you pelting me with frying-pans for?"

A grim laugh came from Mr. Clarkson's lips.

"The Seven Sleepers are no touch to this boy," he said. Then a sudden shadow of suspicion came upon him, and he continued, "That sleep's too sound to be natural. Is the fellow playing possum? By Heaven, if he has had a hand in this I'll split his cranium! Search him, men. If he has that missing blotting sheet on him it's his death-warrant, as sure as I'm a living man."

Two of the men, who had stood behind during this colloquy, now seized on Frank, who was rubbing his eyes as if he were not yet half-awake.

They evidently were well versed in the art of searching, and in less than five minutes had gone through his clothing so thoroughly that not a pin could have escaped their scrutiny.

"Nothing here," said one of them.

"What's all this about?" queried Frank, now seemingly wide-awake, and with a show of indignation. "I hain't stole nothing. What have you got your dirty fingers in my pockets for?"

"You set that trap in the yard," cried Mr. Clarkson, savagely.

"Trap!—yard!—What trap?"

Mr. Clarkson looked at him searchingly. But

innocence itself could not have put on a more perplexed and unknowing air than that on Frank's face. His employer shook his head.

"The boy is all right," he said at length. "There's no game in this, but he'd take the prize at sleeping. Are you wide-awake, Frank?"

"Wide-awake? You bet I am! Who says I've been snoozing?"

"Then run for the nearest doctor. You'll find one at the next corner below. Tell him there's a case of broken leg here, and that he must come at once."

"All right," cried Frank, seizing his hat. "I'll fetch him in a whiff."

In a minute more he was out of doors, where he quaffed the fresh air with a deep sense of relief.

"If that wash't a close pull there's no use talking," he said to himself, with an air of triumph.

"If they'd found that paper on me there'd have been a case of broken neck as well as of broken leg, and one past cure. I bet you, I'm no slouch at detective work. The chap that can get the bulge on the Artful Dodger ain't to be sneezed at. Won't Dick and Joe open their peepers when they get a squint at my find? Oh, I'm a snoozer, from the word go!"

Thus engaged in self-gratulations, Frank made his way to the doctor's office, where he luckily found the physician in and disengaged, and ready to accompany him back without delay.

On reaching the house they found that the wounded man had been carried in and laid on a lounge in Mr. Clarkson's office.

The surgeon examined the hurt with a grave face, making the sufferer groan pitifully as he handled the wounded limb with professional freedom.

"It's an ugly break, I fear," he at length said. "Looks like a compound fracture. The gentleman is in for a rest for the next three months at least."

A look came on Frank's face that was anything but pitying.

"I caught one rat in my trap, anyhow," he ruminated. "I only wish it had been the big one, instead of one of the little critters."

CHAPTER V.

HOW TO NURSE A SICK BEAK.

DURING Frank's return with the surgeon his quick eyes had noted one interesting circumstance. On approaching the house he passed in succession the tramp and the Chinaman, both of whom had resumed their disguises. As he neared the door a third member of the party was leaving it, the "what-is-it."

The boy gave him but one quick glance, but that was enough to reveal to him an important secret. The short coat worn by the foreigner sagged down on one side, as if from a weight in the pocket.

"He's got it!" decided the boy spy. "That's something worth knowing. This is the one the Artful called Vanilli the artist. The soup's getting thicker every minute."

We have already told the result of the doctor's examination of the injured man. On hearing the verdict a volley of execrations came from Amos's lips. He cursed his associates, the step-ladder, the house, and might have gone on to more significant revelations had not Mr. Clarkson stopped his flow of eloquence.

"Shut off steam, you fool!" he cried harshly. "Do you think that losing your temper and swearing like a trooper will cure a broken leg? Dry up, or you will drive the doctor from the house. He is not used to such profanity."

"Bless your heart, let him blow off if he wants to!" said the doctor coolly. "He will be quieter afterwards. I don't enjoy swearing as a steady diet, but a broken leg is no small provocation."

As he spoke he proceeded skillfully with the work of setting the broken leg, aided by Frank, who proved a ready and useful assistant.

"Does it hurt?" he asked the sufferer.

"Hurt! How'd you like to be toasted over a slow fire? Do you think that'd hurt?" groaned Amos.

"I had better give him ether," said the doctor to Mr. Clarkson. "But it will be a loss of time, as I have none at hand. And time just now counts."

"Go on," cried Amos with an oath. "I can stand it. What I can't stand is your asking me if it hurts. Do you think I'm made of cast iron or salt bacon?"

The doctor gave a short laugh at this.

"You're a hero," he said. "Keep your nerve now. It won't be long."

He proceeded in his work of readjusting the broken bone, regardless of the patient's groans,

a task which his professional skill enabled him to do with quickness and dispatch.

"It is not as bad as I feared," he said, when he at length began the work of bandaging. "The fracture is not a compound one. With care and patience you may be fit to walk again in a couple of months."

"That's a blamed fine prospect for a couple of minutes' doings," growled Amos.

"You'd do well to keep your temper, and be careful of your diet, or it may be six months," retorted the doctor.

The bandaging completed, he applied splints to the wounded leg. This done the patient was carried up-stairs, to a bedroom on the second floor.

"Can I get home to-morrow, doctor?" he asked, more calmly.

"To-morrow week, or to-morrow month; I cannot say yet," replied the doctor. "I suppose you can accommodate him, sir," he asked Mr. Clarkson, "till he is fit to move?"

"Oh, yes! I and my boy here can play the nurse."

Shortly afterward the doctor left, having done all he could for the ease of his patient. Mr. Clarkson now dismissed Frank, telling him that he might go to bed, and that he would sit up with the patient.

In truth, Frank was glad enough to get away. He told himself that he wanted to think. What he really wanted was to sleep, for he was worn out with the evening's excitement.

"It has been a jolly night's work," he concluded, when his head was on the pillow. "I've got in deeper on the Dodger in five hours than all the detectives have in five years. If this fellow—with-broken leg—" Then came a yawn that broke off the thread of his thoughts, and in a minute more he was a fast prisoner to slumber.

The next day Frank had more than one task to perform. An important part of the duty which he set himself was the recovery of the valuable paper which he had flitted into the cellar. A second task was to look after the patient, Mr. Clarkson having ordered him to bring up his breakfast, and to attend to his other wants. A third was to satisfy the curiosity of the women, who were not long home before they learned that the house had a new inmate.

"Faix, an' this is a nice state o' things, indeed!" declared Bridget, in a pet. "How came the man to break his leg, then?"

"I reckon it was because the bone couldn't stand the pressure," rejoined Frank.

"That isn't all," broke in Sarah, angrily. "There's my step-ladder smashed into kindling wood. Who's done that? There seem to have been high doings here last night. That comes of our sleeping out."

"The truth is, him, up there," began Frank, pointing upward with his thumb, "went bird-catching. He climbed the ladder to catch a humming bird on top the arbor, and he caught a hummer. That's all, except two broken bits of furniture—a broken ladder and a broken leg."

"Do you know anything about it at all, at all, now?" queried Bridget, suspiciously. "Were'n't you fast asleep through it all, master nimble-tongue?"

"And dreamed all this pretty story?" added Sarah.

"Ask Mr. Clarkson; he'll tell you how wide-awake I was."

"You were about as wide-awake as an Egyptian mummy," said Mr. Clarkson, stepping at this moment into the kitchen as quickly as if he had been there listening. "I could have stirred up a dead man about as easily. And now, bear in mind, I want you all to find something else to talk about. My friend foolishly tried to climb a shaky ladder, and nearly broke his neck for his pains. That's the whole story. He is growling for his breakfast. Is it ready, Bridget?"

"It will be soon, sor. The fire is a vexation this mornin'."

"That's an old fault with your fires," answered Mr. Clarkson shortly. "When it is ready let Frank take it up." He turned and walked away.

"Faix, and what sort of fires does he want me to have, with coal as hard as a miser's heart?" demanded Bridget in a rage. "And makin' a cruel time if ever I burn a trifle of wood. He's welcome to run the fire himself if he can do it so n'ately."

"And does he think I can wash windows with that ladder?" chimed in Sarah. "Yet never a word says he about a new one."

"He's a tyrant—an out and out tyrant," declared Frank, with a wicked desire to stir to a higher pitch the wrath of the indignant women.

"When he hired me there wasn't a word said about carrying up breakfast to one-legged men, and I've a mind to kick. He's going behind the contract."

"Kick, will you?" queried Bridget. "Well, you mought do that same for exercise, for you've little else to do. Wait, now, and I'll give you the man's breakfast. Then you'd best travel lively, or somebody else mought do the kickin'."

Frank laughed at the sudden turn of the tide of Bridget's wrath, and a few minutes afterward took up the breakfast which she had neatly arranged on a waiter.

The black-bearded patient hailed his appearance with a bear-like growl.

"Here at last, are you, Mr. Slow-go-easy?" he exclaimed. "Are you trying among you to starve me? I'm as hungry as six catamounts. I suppose, after all, you've brought me nothing fit for a dog to eat."

"I always heard that a hungry man wasn't particular," rejoined Frank. "The particular ones are them that ain't hungry."

"Dry up, youngster. Who asked for your gab! Set it down, and I'll soon see."

Frank at this set the waiter on a table six feet from the bed, and turned as if to leave the room.

"Hello! you young hound, what are you up to? Fetch it here, instantly, or I'll smash your jaw!"

"I reckon you won't, then," answered Frank, coolly. "I'm bossing this job, and you've got to take a reef in your tongue if you want me to wait on you."

"Why, blame your saucy picture—"

"Hold up, there, old man! You'll not get a mouthful of grub till you ask for it like a gentleman."

At this, Amos, in a hot rage, broke out in a torrent of expletives. Frank seated himself on a chair and quietly looked at him.

"Are you near through?" he asked, at length.

"I can't listen to much more of that sort of thing. I don't want my principles spoiled."

"Bring me my breakfast, or I'll break your impudent neck."

"How will you do it? You can't dance over here on one leg. Don't you think it would be easier and more polite to say please? It's a short word, and don't take any extra amount of breath."

The invalid looked at the boy as if he could kill him. Then, with a sudden change of expression, he broke into a hoarse laugh.

"Oh, you're a gay young rooster! Please give me my breakfast, then. Will that suit your honor?"

"With the greatest of pleasure!" replied Frank, rising and placing the waiter on the table by the bed. "Here's some nice buttered biscuit; and the coffee's prime. Shall I open those eggs for you?"

"Yes, if you please."

Amos was conquered. Frank had won a victory.

The boy now took great pains to satisfy the testy patient. He had done a good job in bringing him to terms, and he wanted to let him see that his politeness was appreciated. When at length Frank left the room, his bear-like charge had subsided to the docility of a lamb.

The young detective had still his most important task to perform—the search for his "squeeze." As soon as he had returned the dishes to the kitchen, he sought the cellar, confidently expecting to find the desired paper on the floor at the bottom of the stairs.

It was not there!

"It has slid further than I thought," he said, and extended his researches.

But, though he walked to the coal-bins in front, no trace of it was visible.

"That's curious," said Frank, retracing his steps, and examining the floor foot by foot.

Still the same result. The paper was not forthcoming.

He now grew annoyed. Where could it have flown? Were there any crevices in the wall? He extended his range of search, examining the wall inch by inch, overturning barrels and boxes, investigating every crack and crevice, but no trace of it could be find.

"What under the seven stars has become of it?" he asked himself, petulantly. "I flung it here, there's no two ways about that. Nobody's been here to disturb it. Where has the confounded thing gone?"

For a full half-hour more he continued his search, but at the end of that time gave it up in despair. The mysterious paper had vanished as utterly as though it were made of morning mist.

"Well, this gets me!" he cried, stamping the

floor in a rage. "I've got a pretty story as it is for Dick and Joe—but to lose the pith of the whole business—it's enough to make a saint swear."

And for the rest of that day, Bridget Maloney found her kitchen help a very cross-grained and disobedient young cub.

CHAPTER VI.

MORE GAME FOR THE DETECTIVES.

SEVERAL days passed, during which Frank Melton had his hands pretty well filled with service, what with running errands for Mr. Clarkson, helping to nurse the invalid, aiding the women, and doing about everything for everybody.

He was beginning to get tired of it—particularly as his detective work showed no signs of progress. Nothing else suspicious took place, the missing paper failed to turn up, and the patient grew as cross as a sick bear.

But Frank had learned how to deal with him. Amos, indeed, appeared to have taken a fancy to his independent nurse, and vented his ill-humor on his host.

"Where's that John P. Clarkson now?" he would exclaim. "Blast his picture, he's got me anchored here, and takes no more trouble about me than if I was a water-soaked log! He's an ungrateful hound—after all I've done for him."

"Oh, come now," said Frank, deprecatingly, "that's rough. Mr. Clarkson is a gentleman and a scholar. Look what he's done for you, in giving you this nice bed, and a nice boy like me to fetch you grub."

"Done for me, shoot him! I haven't set eyes on his ugly face for ten hours."

"Ugly face? Why, he's a mighty handsome man, Mr. Jones."

"Handsome is as handsome does," growled the patient. "Drat him, he ought to know if I'd open my bag and let out all that's in it I'd make him squeal like a stuck pig."

"Now, I wish you'd drop all that," rejoined Frank, with a show of petulance. "I can't stand by and hear Mr. Clarkson slandered, after all he's done for me and you."

"For me, you donkey? What has he done for me? It's only me that's kept him out of jail, if not out of—"

He checked himself suddenly, ending his sentence with an oath directed against his own eyes.

"I'm going to leave," said Frank, getting up, and walking resolutely to the door. "Mr. Clarkson is a gentleman and a Christian, and you don't know him if you say anything else."

"Don't know him!" yelled Amos, breaking into a hot rage. "Don't know him, the thief and rascal! I know enough to hang him, blast him!—Get out of this, boy," he continued, with a sudden change of tone. "You've riled me till I'm talking like a fool. Get, or I'll throw my medicine glass at your head."

"Get's the word," said Frank, as he left the room.

But when fairly out of hearing of the invalid he broke into a laugh of high amusement.

"A gentleman and a Christian! That was neat, mighty neat," he considered. "If I'd called him an angel, that cross-grained chap would have let the whole cat out of the bag. It's a mighty pretty game, and I'm going to play it for all it's worth. I won't talk of anything but the Artful's charity, benevolence, and general piety. If I can only work up old Amos raving mad, he may split on the whole business. My, but isn't it a jolly dodge!"

Frank was bursting with suppressed fun when he entered the kitchen. He tried to put on a demure face, but despite himself little bursts of laughter kept breaking out.

"Sure, an' the boy must ha' been stung by a funny bee," cried Bridget. "An what are you laughing at, for the wurrid?"

"Because I'm happy," answered Frank. "And because it's so nice to live with a gentleman like Mr. Clarkson and two good-hearted ladies like you and Sarah."

"Git out wid your blarney now! I'm sorely tempted to take the clothes-stick till ye.—Or, come back here; fetch me some bits of wood from the cellar, for my fire's dead out."

"Out again?"

"Out ag'in, is it? D'ye expect me to kape a fire in forever wid that stone coal?"

"You've made it new six times this week, to my certain knowledge," declared Frank. "This time counts seven."

"Faix, an' who axed for your 'rithmetic?" cried Bridget wrathfully. "Fetch the wood this blessed minute, or—"

Frank did not wait to hear the end of her sentence, but plunged with a laugh down the

cellar, from which he quickly emerged with an arm-load of kindling wood.

"Now make yourself useful, and let me hear no more of yer blatherin'," commanded Bridget. "Bring me a handful of the paper ye'll find in the closet there, and we'll have a new fire blazin' in the snap of a finger."

Frank obeyed orders, opening the closet door and catching up a double handful of waste paper, with which he started across the kitchen floor.

But, he was not half way to Bridget before he suddenly let the paper fall, dropped on his knees before it, and began hastily to delve into the heap.

"What ails the boy?" cried Bridget in alarm. "Has he gone cl'ane daft?"

"Where did you get this paper?" demanded Frank, as with an air of infinite satisfaction he drew a small square from the mess and thrust it into his pocket.

"Where did I git it, is it? From the cellar, sure, t'other mornin'. It's somethin' more nor a bee that's stung ye this time, I do be thinkin'. What is it, avick?"

"It's a love letter from my girl, that dropped out of my pocket. I've been hunting it everywhere, and here it is in your waste paper."

"A love letter, eh? Faix, the pair o' ye ought to be put in bibs and long clothes. Now, fetch me the paper, will ye?"

Frank obeyed this time, gathering up the fallen mass and carrying it to the kitchen range. But, his face wore a look of curious satisfaction that Bridget could not help noticing.

"A love letter! Sure, an' I never had one in me life. But I'd much like to, indade, for it seems to work on the timper like strained honey. Let me see it now, will ye?"

"After 'while, Bridget. I want to get the good of it myself, first."

Frank broke from the kitchen with these words, fearing the good woman might grow too curious. He hastened to his room, where he drew the prize from his pocket.

It was the lost square of blotting-paper, with the tell-tale record on it.

"It was touch and go," he said to himself. "A minute more and it would have been all ashes. Queer how it came around. It must have slid into Bridget's waste-paper box, and she brought it all up together. I bet I don't take no more chances on it. It's going to Dick Wister by next mail."

He spread the blotter before him, and fixed his eyes curiously upon it.

The surface on which he had taken the "squeezes" showed certain faint lines and tracings from which he could make nothing satisfactory.

He shook his head with an air of discontent.

"It is an ugly business, and that bit of flat steel looked mightily like something I've heard of more than I've seen," he soliloquized. "But I can't make anything out of this. Dick said he'd have it photographed. Maybe it'll come out that way; but it's no go here."

Giving up his effort to read the indistinct record, he took a large envelope from his drawer, placed the blotting sheet within it, and wrote a few lines to accompany it. Then, sealing the envelope he directed it to "Mr. Richard Wister," with street and number.

Frank now slipped quietly down stairs, taking great care not to be seen, and glided out through the front door without a sound.

Reaching the street, he looked heedfully to right and left for Mr. Clarkson. Not till satisfied that he was nowhere in sight did he take another step. Then he hastened to the nearest lamp-post letter-box, thrust in his important missive, and hurried back to the house.

He had got his work in on the firm of Clarkson and Company, dealers in general rascality!

Frank was not long back in the house before Mr. Clarkson returned. He had been out for several hours.

"What have you been doing since I went out?" he asked Frank, on passing that young worthy in the hall.

"Nothing," answered Frank.

"Well, that's a clear and clean confession. I hope it has not tired you. Hold yourself ready, for I may want you to do something before long."

He walked up-stairs and entered the invalid's room, where he shut the door closely. He was closeted there for more than an hour.

Frank felt in his mind that some matter of importance was under discussion, and curiosity more than once took him up to the door of the sick room. But not a sound could be heard, and he retreated in disgust.

At length the Artful left the room, and came down to his office, where he sat at his desk for half an hour more. In that time he tore up more than one written sheet before he could get one to his satisfaction.

"Frank," he at length called sharply.

Frank made his appearance after a minute's delay. He did not care to seem too prompt.

"I have that something now for you to do," began Mr. Clarkson. "Here is a letter which I wish delivered without delay. Look at the address. Do you know that street?"

"As well as I know my own name."

"Take the Sixth Avenue Elevated, and go there as quickly as you can. Put this letter into the hands of the gentleman to whom it is addressed. Don't give it to a servant, or to a young lady who may offer to take it. Ask to see Mr. Herbert Walsh. If he is out, or you are not allowed to see him, bring the letter back. Take care that no one else gets it."

"All right," answered Frank.

"You are sure you understand?"

"If they want that letter, they'll have to get a grip on it like a dentist gets on a fellow's tooth when he's on the pull. I won't say letter till I see Mr. Walsh."

"Good. That's the idea. Here is money for your fare. He will probably give you an answer. If so, bring it back without delay. That is all. Be off now."

Frank took the letter, thrust it into the inside pocket of his vest, and buttoned the coat tightly about him; then taking the money, he left the house without a word of reply.

Clarkson looked after him with a gratified expression.

"I did a good job in getting that boy," he said. "He's smart and quick, and don't need twice telling. And he can be trusted not to think anything but what he's paid for."

If he had known that Frank was in other pay than his own, he might have come to a different conclusion. He certainly would if he had heard the mental remarks of his messenger at that moment.

"I ought to take this to Dick and Joe, and give them a peep at it," he reflected. "I can't do it, though; it's the wrong way, and I've got sharp time to make. But there are the letters I saw him tear up and throw into his waste-basket. I'm going for the bits of them to-night. If I can put them together, I may get to the bottom of some deep job."

As he thus conversed with himself, he was making rapid way toward the Elevated Railroad. In something over half an hour afterward, he was in the street to which he had been sent. He traced the numbers on the doors till he found the one required.

It was a very quiet-looking house, with shutters as closely bowed as though there was some one dead within.

After a quick glance at the front, Frank stepped up and rung the bell. He waited some time for an answer, and was about giving a second impatient pull, when the door opened.

He saw before him a young lady, dressed simply in white with a blue ribbon at her throat, but of such unusual beauty of face, that Frank for the moment stood dazzled.

"Well, sir?" she asked.

"Oh, excuse me! Does Mr. Walsh live here?"

"He does."

"Can I see him?"

"No, sir. If you have any message for him, you may give it to me."

Frank had got his first counter-check.

CHAPTER VII.

STRUCK BY JERSEY LIGHTNING.

FRANK MELTON still stood on the doorstep, looking admiringly at the young lady, who waited his message with some show of impatience.

"You might ask me in, anyhow," he said.

"That depends," she answered with a smile. "I have no time to spare, and your business may be of no importance."

"Now there you're away off the track," cried Frank energetically. "It's the biggest kind of importance. And I've come ten miles, more or less, and am so tired that I've got to stand on one foot, like a chicken, to rest the other."

"Oh, if it's so bad as that you had better come in," she replied, with a rippling laugh.

Frank followed her into the house, his eyes fixed on her with growing admiration.

"She's a ripping pretty girl, and no mistake," he said to himself; "and has a laugh like a silver bell. I tell you, that kind don't grow out of every potato hill, and I'm going to cultivate her."

She led the way into the parlor, and invited

her visitor to be seated, but continued standing herself.

"Now, sir, what message have you for Mr. Walsh?" she asked.

"I was bid to tell it to him and to no one else," answered Frank. "I'd like to oblige you, but orders are orders."

"Exactly. But, what if I am under orders too? If you want your message delivered it will have to be through me. You cannot see Mr. Walsh."

Frank looked up into her resolute face.

"My eyes, but he's got a mighty pretty jailer!" he said.

The young lady blushed and smiled.

"That sounds like flattery," she answered.

"It's solid truth," declared Frank energetically. "But about seeing Mr. Walsh, just suppose you sit down and let us argue it out."

"I don't quite approve of your style of argument," she answered laughingly. "Give me your message, or—" and she pointed to the door.

"That's a regular knockdowner," groaned Frank. "Fact is, miss, I've got a letter for him, which I was to give into his own hands, or take back."

"Very well, you may take it back then," was her cool reply.

This quiet remark gave rise to a remarkable demonstration. For hardly was it spoken when the door, which stood ajar, was flung open as if a heavy weight had fallen against it, and a man came half-staggering and half-stamping into the room.

He was a short, thick-set individual, with a face as red as a beet, and a nose sown with wine pimples till it looked like a nutmeg-grater. He had evidently been drinking, and his little, deep-set eyes glared with wrath.

"What's this I hear?" he roared. "A letter for me, and you won't let me have it? You saucy minx, what do you mean by that? How dare you do it, you jade?"

The young lady had turned pale at this irruption. She drew back a step from the furious speaker, and said:

"I asked him to give me the letter and that I would take it to you."

"What right had you to meddle? Why shouldn't I see people that come to see me? Why shouldn't I?—answer me, minx."

"Because you are not fit to be seen, uncle," she replied firmly.

"You jade! how dare you talk that way to me? Take that—and that!"

And with a quickness born of drunken rage he sprung forward and gave her a ringing slap on the cheek that brought the blood gushing to her face.

He raised the other hand to repeat the insult, but before the blow could fall Frank was on his feet and had rushed between them. In a minute the alert and muscular youth had caught the up-lifted arm, and was pushing the drunken brute back against the wall with an unexpected display of strength.

"I've a mind to smash the blossoms on your nose!" he cried indignantly. "You call yourself a man—and to hit a woman like that! I'd like to shake the rum out of your hide, you brute!"

Shake him he did, for the inebriate was so overcome with surprise at this sudden assault that he made no resistance.

But at this moment the young lady came to the rescue.

"Oh, don't do that!" she pleaded, laying her hand on Frank's arm. "He did not know what he was doing; and you will only make it harder for me."

"Didn't know what he was doing?" cried Frank, releasing his captive. "Then it is time he was learning."

The drunkard took a minute or two to recover from his stupor of surprise. Then he suddenly flamed out again into rage, rushed across the room, and shook his fist in Frank's face.

"You rascally young whelp!" he yelled. "To dare to lay your hands on a gentleman! I'll pulverize you!"

But he didn't touch him, and in spite of his bluster evilently stood in awe of the boy's strength and resolution.

Frank faced him boldly, looking him straight in the eye with an unquailing expression.

"All right," he said. "If you've a mind to try pulverizing I'm your meat. But don't you try it on a girl again—not when I'm around, anyway."

"Oh, let us have no more of this!" cried the young lady in distress. "Uncle Herbert, to think of your striking me! and before a stranger!"

"Then he has the habit of striking you when there's no stranger about?" queried Frank.

"Strike you? Why, I could smash the fellow that did it into mince-meat."

And so undisguised was the admiration of his look that the young lady turned away with a faint blush.

As for Mr. Walsh, after waving his hands with drunken energy about Frank's head, and vituperating like a madman, he fell back into a chair, evidently cowed by the unflinching attitude of his antagonist.

Here he burst into the maudlin tears of the drunkard, bewailing his misfortunes, and blubberingly declaring that he had not a friend in the world.

"What do you live with him for?" said Frank aside to the young lady, who stood with her hands clasped in distress.

"Because I have to," she replied, tears beginning to flow from her eyes. "And there is nobody but me to look after him."

"Don't cry," pleaded the boy soothingly. "I reckon you want somebody to look after you, and I'm going to do it. If he hits you again tell me, and I bet you I'll go for him."

"He is kind enough when he's sober," she replied. "It is only the liquor."

"Then he wants a hole bored in his hide to let the liquor out, for he's bursting full of it. Here's the letter. You can give it to him when he's fit to take it. I was told to bring an answer, but I reckon there's no use waiting for that."

"No. He is in no state to write."

While they spoke Mr. Walsh had gradually got over his maudlin tears, and began to listen. At this last remark he sprang up, crying:

"Who says I can't do business? Give me that letter, mistress. I won't have you meddling with my affairs."

"Here it is, Uncle Herbert. I don't want to meddle. I am sure."

"Yes, you do. You treat me as if I was a great grown-up baby."

"And I reckon she hits it pretty close," said Frank, to himself.

Mr. Walsh tore the letter open with trembling fingers, and slowly read its contents. A cunning look came upon his face.

"You don't want me to go. I see what's up," he said. "But, I will. I'm not in leading strings. Tell Mr. Clarkson, I'll come."

"Mr. Clarkson?" cried the young lady, in a tone of alarm. "Oh, uncle—"

"Shut up! I want none of your jabber!" he cried, petulantly. "I'm old enough to manage my own affairs. Tell him I'll come," he repeated to Frank. "And take your impudent face out of my house. I've seen enough of you."

"If you lay your hands on this young lady again you'll see more of me," replied Frank, indignantly. "I'm going to take her under my wing; remember that, old boozier."

He strode angrily from the room.

The young lady hastened after him.

"Oh, don't talk to him that way! You'll only make trouble for me," she begged, laying both hands on his arm, and looking pleadingly up into his face.

"If I make trouble I'll cure it," answered Frank. "He's got to let you alone, or he'll find he's waked up the bull-dog of the Bowery. I'm going to boss this job, now you bet."

There came a very grateful look into her eyes.

"Alice!" came in loud tones from Walsh. "What are you doing there? Conspiring with that young villain, are you? Come here, I say!"

With a glance of mutual confidence with Frank, the young lady turned and tripped back to the parlor, leaving her knight protector to find his own way from the house. He had not been there many minutes, but long enough to establish confidential relations with the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

"My, but she's a scrounger!" he said to himself, as he went along the street. "And to think of that drunken hog hitting her!—And I to let him off with a shaking! I ought to shake myself that I didn't smash his nose. I s'pose I'll have that to do yet, for she's so blamed pretty and nice that I'm going to keep an eye on her. And if he touches her again I'll go for him like thunder for a milk-pan."

In half an hour more Frank was back at the Bronson street house.

The Artful was in his office, and came out as his messenger entered the door.

"You have made good time," he said. "Have you brought me an answer?"

"Yes. He says he will come."

"Is that all? Didn't he give you a written answer?"

"No, sir. He was too full of Jersey lightning for that."

"Drunk again, was he?"

"Maybe so," answered Frank, "but it looked to me like the same old drunk. He must have been at it a good while to get so soaking full."

"He has," answered Clarkson, with a laugh. "He guzzles like a fish. That will do, Frank."

He walked back into his office, leaving the boy to his own devices.

Frank thereupon concluded to make himself very much at home, and walked into the parlor, where he threw himself into an easy-chair to rest from his arduous labors.

He had not been there long before he heard the Artful leave his office and go up-stairs.

"Going to see his chum," remarked Frank. "Now's a good chance to look after those torn-up letters."

Seeking the office, he investigated the waste-paper basket. To his disappointment it was empty. The Artful Dodger was not the man to leave criminating evidence uncared for.

"Burned up, dead sure," remarked the prying boy. "Anyhow, I don't believe it was anything but an invitation. The Artful ain't the sort to give himself away on paper. Old Boozier Walsh says he'll come. When he comes I'll be there, sure pop! I'll bet high the Artful's talking it over now with the broken-legged kicker! I'm going to take an ear bath, and find out what their confab's about."

With this new idea ripe within his brain, Frank made his way stealthily up-stairs. On approaching Amos's room, he perceived that the door stood a crack open, and through this crevice came the sound of voices.

Frank crept closer. It was the first time he had ever found them together with the door open.

On getting near the crevice he found himself able to distinguish the words of their conversation. He listened intently.

"Then you'll get him to take the other bottle home?" asked Amos.

"Yes. One will begin the work. The drug is a slow one, and the dose must be repeated."

"He'll repeat it fast enough, if it's only something to drink. The fool would swallow aquafortis if it had the taste of brandy."

"We must have the paper signed, first of all, and the queer shoved on him. Once get that done, and he'll be more useful in a coffin than stumping round."

"Very true," answered Amos, with a harsh laugh. "And the drug— But, see here, Jack; that door's open. That ain't like you. We're not talking stuff for loose ears to hear."

With an oath at his carelessness, Clarkson sprang up and hastened to the door. He looked out for prying ears, but no one was in sight. The boy had vanished.

"No harm done," he said, with satisfaction, as he closed the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRANK UNLOADS HIS NEWS BAG.

WE must now return to the locality of our first chapter, the office of the detectives, Richard Wister and Joseph Smith. They are both present, and with them their youthful aid-de-camp, Frank Melton.

A conversation of some length has passed, and the detectives look much pleased at the information which Frank has given.

"You are getting your work in," said Dick, approvingly. "Keep it up, and we'll have the Artful in such a noose, that he can't get his neck out without stretching it."

"I tell you he's jolly cute," answered Frank. "You never saw anybody play it off neater. He's a benevolent, high-toned gentleman, and if you'd leave butter in his mouth for a month it'd come out solid. But you bet I don't take no stock in that. Them quiet eyes of his ain't to be took at a discount."

"Not much," broke in Dick. "Don't trust for a minute to his easy ways. They are only a cloak to hide the rogue beneath them."

"Don't I know it? You ought to seen me coming here, dodging round five hundred corners, and looking all ways for Sunday. I'm not going to be sold for a shilling."

"Stick to that, Frank. You've got no everyday rogue to play with."

"But what have you been up to? Did you make anything of that paper I sent you?"

"A little something," answered Joe, with a knowing smile. "We had it treated in a certain way that photographers have, and then photographed. Do you want to see the photo?"

"That's what I'm here for."

Joe opened the drawer of a table, and drew out a photographic impression, which he laid flat on the table.

"There it is," he said.

What Frank saw was a very faint and indis-

ting impression, blank in some places, but here and there clearly defined, of a *United States bank note*. The figure "10" had come out plainly on one corner, showing that it was a ten dollar bill.

The boy looked at it with interest and satisfaction.

"I knowed it!" he exclaimed. "As soon as I clapped my eyes on that plate, I saw what it was for."

"It is a very neatly made counterfeit steel plate, for printing ten-dollar greenbacks," said Dick. "Your 'squeeze' got too rough handling, but there's plenty here to work on. We're setting our net, and will sweep in the whole gang the minute they try to plant these pretty pictures."

"What are you waiting for? Vanilli carried off the plate. Why don't you nab him, and search for it?"

"In the first place we haven't quite located him. The four men you gave us the names of were only stock-pigeons. The right trail hasn't opened yet. If you get a squint on any of these men again, we want you to track them like a bloodhound."

"Won't I, then?"

"In the second place," chimed in Joe, "we don't want to catch the little birds and let the big one fly. Your operations that night have put Clarkson on the scare. He's watching like a hawk, and will vamose the ranch instanter if one of his pals is touched."

"The fact is, they won't try to shove the queer just now," remarked Dick. "They got too sharp a fright. They'll wait till the air is clear again."

"Or they may print a batch of counterfeits," said Joe, "and put them off through agents West and South."

"I tell you what," suggested Frank, after an interval of reflection, "I don't believe either of you is near the mark. I've got my little theory."

"What is it?" they asked curiously.

"Have you found out anything about Mr. Herbert Walsh?"

"Yes. He has a queer reputation. He is said to be a miser, and to have large sums of money hidden in some secret place. He lives alone, with the exception of his niece and a servant. The poor girl is an orphan, and entirely dependent on him, and he is said to be harsh and brutal to her. His drinking habits have grown on him rapidly within the last year, and in his drunken fits she has a hard life of it."

"He wants a settler, he does!" cried Frank indignantly. "If he touches her again where I am, there's going to be a tussle."

"But what is your theory?"

"Didn't I tell you that the Artful talked of 'shoving the queer' on old Walsh; and getting him to sign some paper? As sure as you live they ain't going to put these counterfeit tens out. They've worked some game to plant them on the old boozier. Maybe they've got a plan to get on his hidden treasure. There's a deep plot somewhere."

"The boy is coming round jovial," said Dick. "He's hot on the trail."

"I do believe he is getting down to the bottom of the puzzle," rejoined Joe.

"That's not all. What are they talking about drugs, and bottles, and doses for? And Walsh is to be most useful to them in a coffin."

"The plot is opening; but it is by no means clear as daylight," answered Dick. "We have gone through all that, Frank, but wanted to hear your say. The plot stands about in this shape. Walsh is to be got, while drunk, to sign some paper upon payment of a certain sum in counterfeit notes. These notes they depend on his hiding away, for they trust to his miserly habits, and have no fear of his falling upon their game by issuing them. To prevent any future danger of that, they are going to dispose of him by poison, and will cover up their tracks by administering some slow drug, that no one will suspect. All this seems clear enough. What we now need to discover, is how they are to benefit by it."

"Just so," broke in Joe. "What is the nature of that paper which Walsh is to sign? And how do they expect to learn where his hoard is hidden?"

"There's where Frank must get his work in," added Dick.

"That's my go," cried the boy energetically. "It's a big contract, but I'm going to take it on. If I go under trying, I hope you'll give me a decent funeral."

"Be cautious, Frank. Remember you're playing with fire."

"I ain't afraid. Clarkson thinks I'm a perfect

jewel. I've shut up his sharp peepers just the neatest. And, what's more, I'm going to keep the plasters on them tight."

"Take care! He may be playing you. He is not to be trusted."

"I'm playing him; just you mind that. And I've got some trumps yet in my hand."

"As for Herbert Walsh we will keep an eye in that quarter. What we want of you is to learn all you can of this interview."

"I'll do my prettiest. If there's a rat-hole near where they're confabing old Mr. Rat has got to get out, for I'm going to borrow his hole."

The detectives laughed heartily at this, and Frank took his departure. His hour's conference with them had helped to clear the track.

The boy was in no hurry to return. He had still an hour or two of leisure. This he spent in a slow saunter, interspersed with occasional brief interviews with old acquaintances.

Suddenly he was brought up all standing. For he found himself face to face with Alice Walsh, who, basket on arm, was proceeding in the opposite direction.

"Hello!" ejaculated Frank. "It's as good as sweet potatoes for dinner to run across you."

"Why, it is my young protector!" she exclaimed.

"Frank's my name. Yourn's Alice, isn't it?"

"Miss Walsh, some folks call me," she replied, with a show of reserve.

"Just so. But I never take hold of names by the back handle—except it's that of Mr. Clarkson; and he's death on dignity. You're quite welcome to call me Frank; and I'm going to borrow the same privilege."

"You are an odd one," she answered, laughing. "But about this Mr. Clarkson," she added, gravely. "You spoke of him yesterday. Do you live with him?"

"Yes. Or he lives with me. I hain't got that just straightened out yet. What do you know about him? You was struck all aback when I spoke of him yesterday."

"I don't like him, that's all. I care to say no more about him. Good-day, I must go on."

"Not yet. See here; you needn't mind my living with him. I know he's a bad lot. I'm only staying there to try and make his house respectable—just to give him a kind of standing in society, you see!"

"That is very kind in you, I am sure," she laughed. "But I must really go."

"Oh, psbaw! There's no hurry. I want to hear all about this Clarkson. I tell you what, he's got some go in hand on your uncle. That letter wasn't sent for no fun. I'm bound to put a spoke in his wheel, and I want to know all about him."

"He does not mean any harm to my uncle!" she cried, in a tone of alarm.

"Don't be too sure of that. Now, what do you know about him?"

"I know this, that it was he who made Mr. Walsh such a drunkard. He drank very little till this man began to visit him, but he led him on and on, until my uncle became almost a sot. I hate the sleek wretch!" she energetically concluded.

"I reckon you do. Did Clarkson come to his house?"

"Yes; he and some others."

"That black-whiskered Amos Jones among them?"

"Yes."

"Why did they want to make him drink? Were they after his money?"

"That I can't say; but it is likely. But if they thought to make my uncle reveal his secrets while drunk, they failed. No one living can learn from him where his money is hidden."

"Not even you?"

"I know no more of it than you."

"He's a jolly cute one, then. Clarkson's after his money; that's sure—and I'm after Clarkson. And I'm going to run him down, or sell out. Say, Alice, sha'n't I come up and see you some time? It's tiresome work, trying to make Clarkson's house respectable, and there ain't no pretty girls down our way."

"Very well, Frank. I'll let you come now and then—out of pity. Now, good-by."

And she tripped lightly away, with a laugh of amusement.

Frank stood looking after her.

"You bet, she's a scrounger!" he ejaculated. "If she ain't walked into my affections, there's no use talking."

hought the confounded youngster was too spry to last. Where is he, Bridget?"

"Sure, sor, an you'd as well ask me where's the bee that jist flew outen the garden. He said as he was goin' home fur some cl'ane duds, but where he is now, sor, there's none o' me knows."

"I'll let him stay home for good, if he tries this on much. I expect some visitors, Bridget. I will be in Mr. Jones's room if any call. And when that boy puts in an appearance, send him up to me."

"I'll do that same, sor."

Had he known that Frank was at that instant quietly couched on the floor under Mr. Jones's bed he would have felt deeper cause for anger. The astute youth had heard some suspicious words spoken, which put him on the track, and had managed to creep into this covert during a temporary slumber of the invalid, to await developments.

They were not long in coming. From where he lay he heard Clarkson enter the room, in company with another person, and a conversation that arose between the two and Amos.

"I expect him every minute," said Clarkson. "We must get him soaking with hard stuff. He is so confoundly suspicious when he's sober."

"Have you got his private bottle ready?" asked Amos.

"Yes." He drew a table near the bedside, and arranged bottles and glasses on it. "Take care that none of you drink from this bottle with the green label. That's Walsh's particular."

A heartless laugh followed. Evidently those men were ripe for any crime.

"I wish the devil had this leg of mine!" cried Amos, impatiently. "Here I've got to lay like a log and look on."

"You can sign your name yet."

"I judge so. The hand is all right, if the leg has gone back on me."

"You'll do, then, for a witness. All we want now is to get his fist to that paper. The rest will do itself."

The interested listener now heard a diversion. Bridget announced at the door that here was another gentleman "that wants to see you, sor," and in a minute afterward the host ushered in Mr. Walsh, presenting him to the others with a great show of cordiality.

"Glad to see you all," he said, in that shrill tone which Frank so well remembered. "How's that leg getting, Jones? I've heard of your little misfortune, and he laughed as if he had made a witty remark."

"It's nothing to laugh at," growled Amos. "It was a blazing trap which Jack, here, set me—getting me to climb a crazy step-ladder. Shoot the luck, I say. I'll be afraid to go upstairs all the rest of my life."

A general laugh followed this.

Then began a conversation on ordinary subjects.

"Ain't this a dry confab?" at length spoke the third man. "Clarkson's got the table very prettily ornamented with bottles and glasses, but it never comes into his cranium to say 'drink.'"

"Dry coppers, eh, Mason?" queried the host.

"Duce take you fellows; you can't talk without wetting every ten words. What 'll you take, Walsh? Here's your favorite old rye."

"I won't mind wetting my lips with that," answered Walsh, with a show of the drunkard's craving.

"Here you are then. Help yourself, Mason."

"This red seal's the stuff for me. I've tested its flavor before."

"Everybody to his taste," chimed in the host. "But take my word for it, Mr. Walsh knows good tippie from bad. I call that green label whisky, Walsh's particular."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Walsh. "That's good; very good. So is the liquor. I know a prime brand every time."

Their conversation for the next half-hour was a bacchanalian one. No suggestion of business was made, and the whole object of the conspirators seemed to be to fill their guests with strong drink.

In this they succeeded admirably. Before the half-hour was up Walsh showed decided signs of intoxication. His voice grew thick, his ideas confused, and he kept breaking out at intervals into bits of song, in a voice that had about as much music as a pile-driver.

"Ha! ha! who says I'm drunk?" he demanded. "I tell you I've got a head of wrought iron. Old rye can't faze it."

"Oh, Sally was a gay young lass."

What's up, Jack? You said something 'bout business. If there's business you'd best get at it 'fore you're all drunk.

"And she fell in love with a looking-glass."

Business is business, every time."

"That's so. Amos is knitting that broken leg of his with whisky, and Bill Mason here is getting as blear-eyed as a turnip. We had better get that job done, Mr. Walsh, while you and I are sober."

"It's too late for that," said Walsh, with a hiccup. "Your 'way 'cross the line yourself, old boy. Lord, what weak heads some men have!"

"Oh! Sally was a grocer's girl, And she twisted her hair in a jolly curl!"

Hand me that glass, Jack."

"Hain't we best all stop boozing, and get down to business?" suggested Mr. Clarkson. "Walsh is the only cool head in the party now. The cute dog will fleece us if we get too full."

"Ha! ha! fleece you?" laughed Walsh. "Little wool I'd get off your tough hide."

At this they all broke out into a fit of laughter, Mason declaring that they must toast that, it was too good to pass.

Another round of drinks was taken, though an observer would have seen that Walsh alone drank deeply, the others very sparingly.

"I have the paper here," now said the Artful. "It is all ready for the signature. Shall I read it to you?"

"What do you buy me for?" demanded Walsh cunningly. "Me put my name to a document on somebody else's reading? I wasn't brought up that way. Hand it over. I'll read for myself."

"I'll bet you don't get no underground work in on old Herb. Walsh," broke in Amos, approvingly.

"He is welcome to read it," answered Mr. Clarkson, with a pretense of vexation. "But I don't like to have my honor doubted."

"Doubt you, old boy!" cried Walsh. "Who doubts you? But business is business."

"Well, here's the paper. You'll find it all square, according to contract."

Mr. Walsh took the paper, and leaned back in his chair to read it. The others sat carelessly conversing, to all appearance, but really watching him like hawks watching a game bird.

With many hiccups, questions which had nothing to do with the subject, and occasional lapses into song, the drunken dupe managed to get through the document.

"Well, I judge it's 'bout the contract," he said. "It's all right, 'cept the consideration."

"Namely, two thousand dollars in lawful money of the United States for your signature to that document. Said signature to be witnessed by our two friends and fellow toppers."

"That's the contract," Walsh briefly replied, with less sign of drunkenness in his voice.

The situation was now growing decidedly interesting to the concealed listener. His position was by no means comfortable, but he dared not move.

What he next heard was a movement across the floor, the pushing of bottles and glasses aside on the table, and a rustling sound as of stiff paper.

"They are brand new. Just come from the paper mill," said Mr. Clarkson. "I drew them from bank to-day, and told them I wanted the last issue. I know your weakness for new notes."

"Yes," answered Mr. Walsh. "I hate that dirty stuff that has been in everybody's clutch, and maybe carries small-pox or yellow fever."

"These are fresh from the printers," laughed Mr. Clarkson, as he rapidly told out the notes.

"No beggar has fingered them yet."

"All tens? Why didn't you get larger figures?"

"This batch just came in. All their large notes were old issues."

"All right. It's money anyhow. And money's money."

Walsh had evidently grown much soberer. "Two thousand. That's the sum. You can tell it over for yourself."

"Business is business," hiccupped Walsh, suddenly growing drunk again.

He was sober enough, however, to carefully run over the batch of notes, satisfying himself fully that the tale was correct.

"And now?" he began, as he drew a great wallet from his pocket.

"Now," repeated Clarkson, laying his hand firmly on the bank notes, "we'll have that signature first. You've sold, old fellow, but you haven't delivered."

"Ha! ha! very good! very good! Two thousand dollars for my name. I never sold it so."

CHAPTER IX.

PRIMING A DUPE.

"WHERE is that rascally boy?" demanded the Artful, after an ineffectual call for Frank. "I

dear before. Fetch the paper. I'm ready to sign."

During the next few minutes the concealed detective judged by the sounds and words that the document—of whose purpose he remained in ignorance—was duly signed and witnessed, and that Mr. Walsh had deposited the price of his signature carefully within his inside coat pocket.

What was the value of the signature the boy could not determine, but he had a very clear appreciation of the value of the consideration money, and he concluded to himself that the first was not worth much if it was measured by the worth of that pile of ten-dollar bills.

"It's a clean sell," he said to himself. "Counterfeits, every one of them. It's a cheap cheat, old boozier, except I pull you out of this hole that you've rammed your head into."

Meanwhile the whisky-loving party were hilariously toasting their bargain, and Mr. Walsh seemed to have grown very tipsy again. But, Frank had begun to grow suspicious of his drunkenness—he seemed able to throw it off so easily.

"Say, old boss, that is a glorious tippie, and no mistake," he declared.

"You like it?" queried Clarkson. "By Jove, then, I'll make you a present of some. Here's a brace of bottles to take home with you."

"You don't mean it? Much 'bliged, then. I'll have a jolly boozin' time all to myself. Now I'm goin'. Bottle's empty, and biz is all done. Goin' home."

"I'll go home with the boys in the morning."

Good-by. Take care yerselves."

And with a bottle clasped under each arm, and still singing snatches of song, he rose and reeled toward the door. The others sprung from their seats and accompanied him.

"We'll see you safe out," said the Artful.

"Take care you don't break your bottles."

"Break 'em? What ye take me fur? Goin' ter drink 'em."

Out of the door they went in company, while Amos rolled over in bed with his face to the wall, cursing his luck.

This movement the alert boy took instant advantage of, crawling silently from under the bed. Raising his head, Frank peered at the irate rogue, who was gazing intently at the wall and swearing vigorously to himself.

Now or never! The boy wormed silently over the floor, every slight sound being drowned in the noise of the party without, and the oaths of the invalid within. Not till he reached the sill did he rise to his feet. The retreating party was at the foot of the stairs.

Frank slipped like a flash from the room and up to the third floor, where he remained till he heard the door close below, and steps re-ascending the stairs. Not till they had entered Amos's room and closed the door behind them did he stir. Then he glided down stairs and out the front door, which he closed with all care behind him.

Reaching the street, he looked eagerly for Mr. Walsh. There he was, about a block away. He knew him by the way he clasped his precious prizes under his arms.

"He's half-full of poison now, and don't know it," said Frank. "It ain't begun to work yet. And he's got two more bottles of it under his arms. It isn't in my bones to stand by and see murder done. But it won't be any use talking to the old fool. Some other scheme has got to be worked."

He followed sharply as he spoke.

Before many minutes he was close behind old Walsh—almost within touching distance. The drunkard staggered as he walked. And Frank could hear him talking to himself, with a peculiar chuckle:

"Two thousand brand new notes for signing that paper," he said, with a drunken laugh. "If they only knowed how much they'll get! They're sold! sold! sold!"

"Then there's been a double sell," thought Frank. "Here goes to make it a triple."

Starting forward, he bounced against the drunkard with a force that sent him sprawling on the pavement, while the bottles flew from under his arms. The clash of broken glass filled the air.

With a laugh Frank turned and ran back, satisfied that he had effectually done his work, and not caring to face the irate drunkard.

He was too hasty, as it proved, for only one of the bottles was broken. After making the air blue with his opinion of the awkward fellow who had overturned him, Walsh gathered up the unbroken bottle in his arms and staggered on, nursing it like a sick baby.

CHAPTER X.

THE DOWNFALL OF "WALSH'S PARTICULAR."

A week had passed after the events recorded.

"The fellow ought to be dead as a door-nail by this time," remarked Clarkson to Amos, who was now able to sit in an easy-chair in his chamber. "I don't know what to make of it. Mason says he is as spry as a lark."

"What do you expect of a miser?" queried Amos. "He is boarding his whisky with his cash."

"No," and the Artful shook his head. "No drunkard is a miser with his drink. Something must be done to hurry this up. He will be trying to spend some of that bogus money next."

"No fear of that, while he has any old notes. The man has a craze for new money."

"But he might spoil his signature by a new one, and take the wind out of our sails. This thing has got to be hurried. I am not going to trust to chance."

As he said this the door opened sharply, and Frank entered the room, bearing a tray load of eatables.

"What do you mean, you young cur!" said Mr. Clarkson, springing up in rage. "How dare you come in here in that fashion?"

"What fashion would you like?" asked Frank coolly. "I come in the door, because I didn't like to crawl in at the window, or drop down through the ceiling."

"Haven't you politeness enough not to interrupt a private conversation?"

"There ain't no sign outside; 'private confabs going on.' Bridget sent me up with Mr. Jones's dinner. And he looks hungry enough to eat a locomotive."

"Hungry? You bet I am!" cried Amos. "You'd best vacate the ranch, Clarkson. There is no room here for interlopers."

"Somebody's got to take the hint," rejoined Clarkson, in a tone divided between vexation and amusement. "If the boy won't, I must," and he left the room.

"Put it here, Frank. I'm glad you froze him out. Grub suits me better than talk just now. And he's so thundering cross-grained he tires me."

"Who? Mr. Clarkson?" demanded Frank, with an air of surprise. "Oh, come, now, that's too rough! After all he's done for you, too!"

"Done for me? Him? Why, blast his eyes, I'd like to see him go back on me!"

"He is a kind, honest, open-hearted gentleman, that's what he is," declared Frank, with a great show of earnestness. "It isn't everybody that would put up with your ill-temper, as he does."

"He put up?" cried Amos, in a rage. "Why, you fool, if you only knew— My ill-temper— By— That's too good!"

"And he is so frank and open."

"Open? He! Bless my eyes!" Amos broke into an ironical laugh. "Well, I didn't know how well his plan worked. Oh, yes, he's open. If he had a document that would hang him he'd lay it on a table, and carefully lock up his waste papers. That's his dodge. He knows human nature like a brick. Now, what have you got here, boy? You've 'most spoiled my appetite by stirring up my temper."

He proceeded to eat his dinner, interspersing it with occasional growls at the expense of his host, whom the mischievous boy continued to praise.

"The Artful's a bigger fool than I took him for," mused Frank, on leaving the room. "If he had any wit he'd drop this chap, who blurts out all he knows when he's riled. So the Artful leaves his dangerous documents lying loose, and locks up his innocent ones? That's a mighty nice point to know. I'm going to work it for all it's worth."

An hour afterward Frank left the house, having got an afternoon's leave of absence from Clarkson, to attend to some necessary affairs at home.

Had the Artful Dodger suspected and followed his messenger, however, he would have found him setting out in a very different direction from his home. Fortunately for Frank's plans his employer did not suspect him.

His course, indeed, was up-town, and ended in that street where lay Mr. Walsh's residence. Reaching the locality of his former visit, he rang the bell. This time a kitchen girl, with a pronounced snub to her nose, opened the door.

"Is Miss Walsh in?" he asked.

"She is, sor."

"Can I see her?"

"Walk in, sor. I'll ax the lady."

Frank was ushered into the parlor, and the maid disappeared.

In a few minutes her snub nose again showed itself.

"I'm bid to ax your name, sor. And she bids me say that she's in if she knows you, sor; but she's out if she don't."

"Did she say just that?" laughed Frank. "Then tell her it's a boy; and his name's Frank Melton; and he knows her like a breeze."

The kitchen jewel again disappeared. Soon she returned once more.

"She'll be down this evenin', sor, if you'll kindly wait."

"This evening?" cried Frank. "Are you sure she didn't say next week?"

"No, sor, I'm not." And the girl disappeared with a face of unruffled serenity.

"We'll, I'll be fizzled!" exclaimed Frank.

"That specimen ought to be put in a glass case, at so much a peep. It isn't safe to let wild animals like that run at large. This evening? I wonder if I'm invited to stay to supper."

His doubt was soon settled by the appearance of Alice Walsh, who greeted him with a smile of pleasure.

"Have I kept you waiting?" she asked.

"Not much. I expected to wait till sundown, anyhow; and maybe till next week."

"Why, what put such silly notions as that in your head?"

"That's the message you sent me, by your jewel of a maid-servant. She also told me that you were at home if you wanted to see me, but you were out if you didn't."

Alice looked at him with an air of perplexity, which was followed by a burst of laughter.

"You are joking?"

"Not a bit! Oh, she's just a jewel."

"She grows stupider every day," declared Alice. "And it is hard to see how she does it, for I fancied she was as stupid as any human being could be to begin with."

"I tell you she's a genius!"

"What I told her was that I am very much engaged just now. My uncle is not at all well."

"You don't say so?" exclaimed Frank, with a sudden show of interest. "What seems to ail him?"

"I can't tell. He has been weak and drooping ever since he was out last week. He has been in his room ever since."

"It's the poison working," said Frank, to himself. "Lucky I broke those two bottles. Is he tripping?" he asked her.

"No. He has not touched liquor."

"Maybe that's it. Stopped off too sudden."

"I thought of that. I am certainly frightened about him."

"Have you called in a doctor?"

"A doctor? He would not listen to it."

"I see. Doctors cost money," suggested Frank. "Come now, you must let me see him."

"You?"

"Yes. I know something about medicine. I swept out a drug-store once."

"And took in all you found on the floor?" she asked, laughing.

"Alice!" came in a querulous voice from above.

"There. I must go."

"Alice!" came more sharply.

"Yes, uncle.—Wait, Frank, I will be back soon."

She tripped up-stairs.

Frank, who had no idea of waiting, followed her. He was curious to see what had been the effect of "Walsh's particular."

In a minute he had followed Alice into a sitting-room on the second floor, where the invalid was seated in an easy-chair before the fire. That he was far from well was evident to Frank at a glance, for he had changed greatly since he last saw him. His cheeks were sunken, his eyes inflamed, his general aspect cadaverous.

On the table before him was a bottle, as yet unopened. Frank's eyes fell quickly upon this, and to his surprise and alarm he saw that it had a green label. Was this some more of "Walsh's particular?"

"What have you done with the corkscrew, girl?" demanded the invalid, angrily. "You have hid it somewhere."

"Oh, uncle!" cried Alice, in distress, "you are not going to drink again?"

"Hold your tongue, vixen. I'll do as I please. Bring me that corkscrew."

"I wouldn't drink that," said Frank, who had advanced to the table. "It isn't good for you."

"Who are you?" demanded the angry invalid. "What fellow is this you've brought here, girl? Show him the door."

"I can see it without showing," answered Frank. "It's a pretty piece of wood-work. But I ain't worth a cent in the carpenter line."

"Why, you impudent— Get out, now, before I put you out."

"I've got some business with you, Mr. Walsh," rejoined Frank. "When that's done, I'll go. You needn't invite me to stay any longer. Your society isn't such a treasure that I'd wait to be kicked out."

As he spoke he seated himself coolly opposite the frate invalid, planting one foot under the table, and lifted the other to cross his legs. He raised it too high, as it proved, for his knee caught the end of the table, and tilted it up several inches from the floor.

The bottle at once began to slide down the surface of the table. Mr. Walsh, with a loud oath, made a desperate clutch to save it. Frank did the same, but his hand awkwardly struck the bottle and dashed it forward. In an instant more it fell to the floor with a loud crash of broken glass. The amber-colored liquid flowed in pitiless lines over the carpet.

Frank sprung from his chair, and started back with an appearance of intense alarm, while the invalid jumped to his feet as if he had been shot up by a spring, and filled the room with curses.

As for Alice, she stood in the background, with a look divided between dread and satisfaction.

"Out of my house, or I'll kick you out!" roared the invalid. "You awkward hound! A whole bottle of prime liquor spilled! By—you shall pay for it, or I'll take it out of your hide."

"I didn't go to do it, Mr. Walsh," declared Frank, with a show of contrition.

"Didn't go to do it!—Hand over its price, or I'll beat you to a mummy."

"I'll make it all right. I'll bring you two bottles for one. Wait," cried Frank, and he hurried from the room.

Alice was hastening after him, to beg him to do nothing of the kind, but she was brought back by a peremptory call from her uncle.

"You want to stop him, minx. Let him go. And if he don't come back, I'll make you pay dear for it. It's a trick between you. I know it."

Frank did come back. In about ten minutes he reappeared in the room, bearing with him a bottle of liquor in each hand. Alice, who was on her knees picking up the fragments of the broken bottle, looked up at him reproachfully, but he placed his burden on the table.

"There you are, Mr. Walsh," he said. "I was awkward, but I've made it all right now, haven't I?"

"Yes," said the mollified miser, as he fixed his eyes with the drunkard's craving appetite on the bottles. "I forgive you, boy."

"Then it's all square? If it is, I'll get, before I break another."

"You'd better. But wait. I've got an idea. You can write your name?"

"I reckon I can fling that much ink."

"Then I want you as a witness to a paper I am going to sign. Alice, bring me the pen and ink. And call up Mary from the kitchen. I want two witnesses."

"Won't I do for one?" asked Alice.

"No. Call Mary. I don't want you."

Alice left the room to obey this order, while Frank waited in great surprise.

By the time Alice had returned, with the snub-nose genius of the kitchen, Mr. Walsh had drawn a legal-looking document from his pocket, which he unfolded only sufficiently to show a line in writing. To the bottom of this he affixed his name, with trembling hand, and then showed the two witnesses where he wished their signatures.

This done, he carefully folded it again, placed it in a large envelope, and sealed the letter tightly.

"You are interested in this, Alice," he remarked. "The time may come when you'll find it valuable. But I don't think it will come soon." He placed the envelope carefully in his pocket. "Now bring me the corkscrew."

Ten minutes afterward Alice bade Frank good-by at the door.

"What is that paper?" she asked.

"You have me there. I know no more than the man in the moon."

"But why did you break that bottle?"

"To save your uncle from being poisoned."

CHAPTER XI.

FRANK ON A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY.

"AND what are ye doin' now, sure? Who tould ye to be meddlin' there?"

Frank looked up hastily at this voice. He

had reason to be startled, for he was deep in the work of examining the papers in Mr. Clarkson's desk, and had been caught at this suspicious task by Bridget.

"Is that you, Bridget?" asked the boy, trying to regain his equanimity, and to invent some excuse for his labors.

"Faix, it's not me aunt, nor me grandmother. It's about me own size and shape."

"Then come here and help me. I know it is somewhere around here."

"What is, then?"

"My pocketbook. It had a whole dollar and a half in it, and I can't find it nowhere."

"Ye's pocketbook, is it? An' you're s'aking it 'mong the master's papers?"

"It's somewhere, Bridget. And I've looked everywhere else."

"Indade an' I didn't think ye were sich a fool. How'd it iver git there now?"

"You haven't found it, Bridget? If you have, hand it right over. I want it, and I'm going to have it."

"Sure, then an' you'll get it, and more till the back of it, if the master finds ye rummagin' there. He won't even let me dust them papers, he's so mighty particular 'bout them. Put 'em back now, and I'll say nothin'."

Thus admonished, Frank began to replace the papers, though he would have liked a half-hour more of undisturbed search. So far he had found nothing to repay him for his trouble.

"I want my pocketbook," he repeated. "It had a dollar and a half in it, and a diamond."

"A di'mond, is it?"

"Yes. A big one. I gave a quarter for it on the Bowery."

"Faix, and di'monds must be chape there," laughed Bridget. "Come now, the master's left word ye're to brush his clothes in the closet up-stairs. I was bid to tell you when you come in."

"All right, Biddy," rejoined Frank, who had now finished replacing the papers. "Maybe he's found my dollar and a half and my diamond. I'm going through his pockets."

"Don't let him see ye then, for he's tinder on that pint. Ye'd niver think how he hates rummagin'."

It was with a feeling of some disappointment that Frank ascended the stairs to Mr. Clarkson's room. Amos's suggestion had induced him to think that he might find some important evidence among the papers in the office desk, and in particular the one which Mr. Walsh had signed.

He had discovered nothing, however, but bills and receipts, ordinary letters, and the like. Unfortunately, Bridget had interrupted him as he was on the point of searching deeper, for it was quite possible the desk had secret drawers.

"That woman's got her nose everywhere," he said, discontentedly. "I wonder if she's put up to act the spy. Maybe that's it. The Artful's an old bird, all the time."

Seeking Mr. Clarkson's clothes closet, he threw it open, and began energetically to brush the garments that hung there. Nor did he fail to investigate the pockets of the various articles of clothing, possibly with the hope of finding his dollar and a half and the twenty-five cent diamond.

Laying them on the bed as finished, he continued till he had emptied the closet. If he had hoped to find anything of value he was disappointed.

In the bottom of the closet lay several pairs of shoes and slippers.

"I judge they're to be done too," he said. "A job's a job, and them slippers want a jolly brushing out, for they're sinful dusty."

Picking up a pair of well-worn cloth slippers that lay in a corner of the closet, he began an energetic brushing. One of them seemed puffed out.

"There's something in this," he said, giving the heel a hard knock on the floor. "Maybe it's a mouse nest, with a baker's dozen of young mice."

The hard knock had evidently dislodged something, and a close roll of paper dropped out and fell on the floor.

"It looks more like a mare's nest," said the boy, picking it up and carelessly unrolling it.

But his eyes suddenly dilated, and he finished opening the paper with nervous haste. He had seen the name of "Herbert Walsh" signed at bottom.

Running his eyes hastily over it, a whistle broke from his lips.

"Jupiter!" he cried, "here's findings. It's the identical paper they got the old boozier to sign. Here's their names as witnesses. My, ain't the Artful a boss at hidin'! And ain't the ferret

some pumpkins at findin'! Now let's take this in, for it's mighty interesting."

He began a careful perusal of the document. But before he was half through it he got a start. Footsteps sounded at the head of the stairs.

Quickly rolling up the paper he thrust it back into the slipper, and flung the latter into the closet, following it up with its mate. He then snatched up a shoe, and stood upright, rubbing at it vigorously with a cloth.

At this instant Mr. Clarkson entered the room. He looked at him with questioning eyes.

"What are you at?" he asked harshly.

"Bridget told me I was to brush up your things. I've been through the clothes, but these shoes are mighty dusty."

"Never mind them. Put them back. I want you to go on an errand for me. I will return the clothes to the closet."

"As you please, Mr. Clarkson."

"Take this package to No. — Third avenue. There ask for the rooms of Mr. Francisco Wilson. Give him this, and tell him I sent it."

He handed the boy a very small parcel, not much larger than a pen-handle in size. It was closely wrapped in paper, which was fastened with mucilage.

"All right, sir. I'll find him. Am I to bring anything back?"

"No. Be off, now, and lose no time. And take good care not to lose that package."

Without further words, Frank thrust the light parcel into his pocket and left the room. It was a question in his mind whether Mr. Clarkson suspected his late operation, and took this plan to get rid of him that he might investigate.

"But what'll he find if he does?" the boy asked himself. "I rolled it up just as it was, and left it where I found it. But you bet it ain't all in that paper. Some of it's inside my brain-pan. And what's there is going to stay and to work. The Artful thinks he's bound to make a big scoop, but I've got a sort of idea he'll be left."

As he thus communed with himself, he was making his way along the street. The spot he was seeking was several miles distant, but the day was a fine one, the air fresh, and the journey full of enjoyment.

"I'd like to know what's inside this," he said, taking out the parcel and looking at it. "But that can't be done without ripping the paper, and a rip would give me away bad. I reckon I've got to take it out in guessing."

At this moment he was startled by a hearty stroke on the shoulder that nearly made him drop his parcel.

"Which way now, ferret?"

He turned and saw the well-known face of Dick Wister.

"Hello, Dick! That you?"

"About my size and complexion. What have you there?"

"That's what I'm going to tell you, and more, too. I've got a bagfull of news. Come on, for I'm making time."

The detective looked keenly around, with an instinctive distrust of suspicious observation. He then walked on by the boy's side, listening intently to the interesting story which Frank had to relate.

"By Jovel the plot's thickening," he said. "The Artful Dodger is playing his game with his old keenness. He would discount us all only for you, my lad."

"It's not time to pull the string yet," said Frank.

"No. He has not gone too far to draw back. If we made a move now, he'd shrink like a turtle into his shell, and laugh at us. Our only hold on him, so far, is in the counterfeit money he paid Walsh, and that is out of sight and reach. If we told Walsh of it, he'd be sure to put the Artful on his guard, and every speck of evidence would be destroyed. I'd like to get my hands on that fellow Vanilli, before they take an alarm."

"What do you think this is? It is wrapped up so tight I am afraid to tamper with it."

Dick took the parcel and looked at it curiously.

"I have an idea," he said at length. "Come in here. It's easy enough to open."

He led the way into a drinking-saloon, and to an untenanted table, bidding the waiter to bring him a cup of hot water. On the arrival of this he soaked the parcel till the mucilage was dissolved, and then carefully unrolled the wet paper.

"It's not so hard a job, you see," he said to Frank.

A very few seconds sufficed to reveal a small steel instrument, upon which Dick fixed his eyes

knowingly. One end was pointed, and ground into a peculiar shape, with cutting edges.

"As I thought," remarked Dick, closely observing it.

"What is it?" asked Frank.

"An engraver's tool. These fellows have got some other nice little job on hand. This has been made for some particular part of the work."

"Another counterfeit?" queried Frank, in surprise. "All I've got to say, then, is that I'm about the first fellow to shut up the Artful's eye. To think of his trusting me with it!"

"That's not hard to get at. He don't care to trust it to the mail, and for good reasons of his own he is skittish about visiting his pals. But he has an honest messenger-boy, whom no one will suspect, and who always strictly obeys orders."

"When he doesn't bust them," laughed Frank. "But who is this Francisco Wilson?"

"That's to find out. By his name he ought to be half-foreigner and half-English. Go on and finish your errand. I'll wait here for your report. Keep your eyes wide open."

"No danger of them shutting. Their eyes are propped open."

As they talked, Dick had procured a slip of wrapping paper, of the same size as that removed by wetting. Rolling the graver's tool carefully in it, he sealed it with mucilage, procured from the landlord.

"Now make tracks, young man," he admonished Frank. "You're wasting your employer's time, which I'm sorry to see."

"I'm not wasting my time, at any rate," laughed Frank, as he set out.

He continued his course without further interruption until he reached the locality to which he had been directed.

It was a large tenement house. Entering it, he soon learned by inquiry that Francisco Wilson lived there, and was directed how to find his room.

Making his way up the well-worn stairs to the room in question, he sought to open the door, but it failed to yield. It was locked inside.

"Can't play that," he said. "Mr. Wilson don't keep open house to strangers. He ain't that sort. Got to knock, or stay out."

And he gave a thundering rap.

The quick ears heard certain sounds inside, as if the occupant had been disturbed, and was making some quick movements. But the door continued closed till the impatient boy had knocked again.

"What's he want?" came in foreign tones from inside.

"I want to see Mr. Wilson," answered Frank. "Got something for you."

The door was now partly opened, revealing a man of small frame and spare face, clad in a greasy and torn dressing-gown. Yet Frank had to repress an exclamation of satisfaction on seeing him. He sought to push into the room, but the occupant closed up the passage.

"What's he got?" he demanded.

"This," answered Frank, producing his small parcel. "Mr. Clarkson sends it."

He used his eyes diligently in a close study of the room while the tenant was taking the object handed him.

"Zat all?" he asked.

"Any answer?"

"No."

"Zen zat's all," rejoined Frank, mocking his tone.

At this the door was closed abruptly in his face, and the key turned in the lock.

"Polite, you are!" cried the boy. "But there's something you can't never lock out. I've got you down, old buzzer."

He made haste back to where he had left Dick.

"Well?" asked the latter.

"It's panned out fine," rejoined Frank.

"Who is he?"

"It's Vanilli, the 'what-is-it,' as sure as sin, and he's at it again."

CHAPTER XII.

A PIECE OF BROKEN GLASS.

THE business was ripening. Sharp as was the Artful Dodger, he had taken a firebrand into his house in the shape of his messenger-boy. Frank had brought the counterfeit engraver under the eyes of the detectives, and had learned the character of the mysterious document signed by Walsh. But there was one thing more to do before springing the trap, and this was to trace the counterfeit notes into Clarkson's possession. This could best be done through Walsh's aid.

Not knowing just how to go about this, Frank,

after reporting upon his errand, made his way slowly toward Mr. Walsh's house. He had two objects in view—one, to look out for opportunities; the other, to visit his young lady friend.

As he drew near the house, however, he stopped and looked keenly before him. There, about half a block in advance, was a familiar figure. That vigorous form, erect gait, gold-headed cane, and general air of high respectability could belong to but one person, and that person Mr. Clarkson.

"What's he got under his weather-gauge now?" asked Frank, suspiciously. "He's bound for old Walsh's house, sure pop. There's some extra game up. Maybe he's going to the old boozier's funeral; or to ask him why he ain't dead."

Frank drew back, lest he should be seen, but kept a keen eye on the figure before him.

He was correct in his deduction, Mr. Clarkson, for it was indeed he, stopped at the door of the Walsh residence, and rung the bell. While he stood waiting admission Frank hid himself in a neighboring doorway. He did not care to be a target to those sharp eyes.

After a minute's waiting the visitor was admitted, and Frank was at liberty to leave his covert. He at once made his way to the house and seated himself comfortably on the doorstep. He deemed it unwise to follow his master too closely.

Meanwhile Mr. Clarkson had been shown to the room of his intended victim. Alice was out of the house for the moment, and the kitchen genius was in charge, or his progress might have been less easy.

He found Walsh seated beside the table, still looking much the worse for wear, and as if a strong dose of his ordinary stimulant was sadly wanted.

"Hello, old lad!" cried Clarkson cheerily. "Why, what's the matter with you? You look as if you'd been hauled over a door-scraper."

"Is that you, Clarkson?" demanded Walsh. "Where have you been this week past?"

"Oh, around town."

Clarkson helped himself to a chair, facing his host, and regarded him closely and seriously.

"Come, Walsh, you've been sick. Own up," he said.

"Suppose I have? It has not troubled you much."

"I tell you what, old lad, your nerves are shaken. You want another sup of 'Walsh's particular.' I've brought you a fresh bottle. A man as sick as you wants medicine, and this is the cure for your complaint."

He slipped a bottle from under his coat and set it on the table.

"There, old lad; that's the genuine green label. There's the stuff to topch you in the sore spot."

Walsh fixed his eyes on the bottle with an expression divided between temptation and disgust.

"Take it away," he ejaculated. "I've sworn off. I am done with liquor, from this day on."

At this Clarkson lay back in his chair, roaring with laughter.

"You're a genuine temperance brick," he declared, slapping Walsh on the shoulder. "Stick to that, old chap. It's a deuced shame though, to go back on your best friend."

As he spoke he drew the cork from the bottle, and poured out a glass of the amber-colored liquid.

"Not to drink," he remarked. "Only to look at. It's too pretty to keep corked up."

"Take it away. I've sworn off, I tell you."

"Well, it won't make you drunk to look at it. Where's all your resolution?"

"Here!" cried Walsh, seizing the glass, whose contents he seemed for the moment about to fling in his visitor's face. He turned, however, and flung glass and all at the window, with such force that they broke through.

"There! Curse the poison stuff!"

Clarkson gave a slight start. His victim had hit uncomfortably near the truth. He looked at Walsh to see if there was any hidden meaning in his words, but saw only a look of drunken resolution.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the tempter, "old Walsh has wakened up in earnest." But he laid his hand on the bottle in fear that it might be sent after the glass.

"I've took my last dram," declared Walsh. "It's been the ruin of me, Jack Clarkson, and you led me into it, blast you!"

"Me?" cried Clarkson, virtuously. "Why, you tippling daisy, I've done my best to keep you from it. I could no more hold you back than a three-year-old roadster. But it isn't that I came to talk about, old lad. It is another matter."

Walsh's eyes, which had been roaming about the room, were now fixed on the bottle, and into them was coming a show of the old craving. Clarkson quietly withdrew his hand. He had no further fear for the bottle.

"I don't want to ask you where you keep your spare cash," began Clarkson. "That's none of my business. But if anything should happen; if you were to drop off suddenly for instance; you ought in justice to your heir to leave something to show where it may be found."

"Tell you where it is, eh?" demanded Mr. Walsh, with a suspicious twinkle in his eyes. "I don't trust you that far, Jack."

"Tell me—I don't want to know. But you should leave some paper, some indication—"

"Should I?" Walsh's hand had now advanced, and was tremblingly stroking the bottle. His eyes grew more eager. Clarkson watched him covertly.

"In justice to your heirs, you should."

But leaving the tempter and his dupe we must return to the young detective, whom we left seated on the door-step of the mansion within which this scene was taking place.

A considerable time passed. Then, thinking he had waited about long enough, he rose with the intention of ringing. But at that moment he saw a well-known form turn the corner and come tripping toward him. It was Alice Walsh.

"Well," she said, on coming up, "keeping vigil on the door-step, are you?"

"I knew you wasn't inside."

"How?"

"By instinct."

"What a powerful instinct you must have," she laughed.

"Well, maybe I had another reason. Your uncle has a visitor, and I didn't like to disturb him."

"A visitor! Who?"

"Mr. Clarkson."

She started, while an expression of dread came upon her face.

"What brings him here?" she asked, in a low tone. "After what you told me, the very name of that man frightens me. Why has he come?"

"That's more than I can say."

"Then I am going to find out. I will not rest under this dread."

She was moving impulsively to the door when Frank's voice stopped her.

"Hold up. You'll just make trouble if you go off that way. Sit down here, and let's have a talk. Nobody ever does any good jumping at things."

She checked her hasty movement, seated herself beside him, and a conversation of some interest ensued between them. At the end of about ten minutes they rose to enter the house.

"Think he will keep it?" asked Frank.

"Yes. He promised me faithfully he would quit drinking. Those two bottles you brought him he let me empty out, and has not had a drop in the house since."

"He didn't lose much in emptying them," chuckled Frank. "But I wouldn't take much stock in his having none in the house. I've heard that story before."

"I can't help trusting him, he was so earnest about it," she answered, as they entered.

"Well, he's got the devil at his elbow now, anyhow," rejoined Frank.

Not many steps had they taken when there came a loud and querulous call from the upstairs sitting-room.

"Alice! Where are you, girl?"

"Here I am, uncle. I've just come in."

"You're always gadding. Come here at once, and bring me some hot water and sugar."

She cast a frightened glance at Frank, who looked knowing.

"What did I tell you?" he said. "Rum punch."

"Oh, I hope not!"

The demand came again more sharply than before, and with a set and white face she hastened to obey.

As she ascended the stairs Frank kept at a short distance behind her. Some premonition of coming evil warned him to be on guard.

"Well, it takes you a time!" cried her uncle angrily as she entered the room.

"Oh, uncle! to drink again after all you promised me."

"Hold your tongue, jade. Bring me the hot water. Don't you see I'm entertaining a friend?"

The distressed girl advanced tremblingly to the table; but as she came near it the glass vessel of water fell from her unsteady hand, and crashed into fragments on the floor.

This accident brought Walsh, who was

evidently quite drunk again, to his feet in a rage. "You stupid fool!" he roared. "Do you want to ruin me?"

He advanced upon her so threateningly that she retreated hastily, striking the table in doing so and knocking from it the half-emptied bottle of strong drink.

This accident seemed to convert the drunkard into a madman. He sprung furiously upon the girl, and struck her a blow that felled her to the floor.

Then he rushed upon her and was about kicking her prostrate form when Mr. Clarkson came to the rescue, seizing him by the collar and jerking him back so strongly that he in his turn was hurled prostrate amid the fragments of the broken vessel.

"You drunken brute!" said Clarkson in disgust. "To treat a woman in that way!"

Frank had not witnessed this assault unmoved. He sprung into the room at the same moment, with a fierce purpose of assaulting the drunkard. But on seeing him thus dealt with, he turned his attention to the fallen woman, flying to her aid.

"She's dead or out of her senses," he cried to Mr. Clarkson.

"Ha, boy, you here? What does this mean?"

"It means that we both visit at the same house," answered Frank with ready wit. "You visit the uncle and I the niece. What are we to do with her, Mr. Clarkson?"

"Get her out of this, and let the kitchen girl bring her to. It is only a swoon. Help me carry her out."

Walsh lay groaning on the floor, but to this they gave not the least heed, not even looking toward him. Picking up Alice between them, they carried her from the room, and laid her on a lounge in an adjoining chamber. Then Frank ran hastily down-stairs, and brought up the girl to her relief.

By the time he returned, however, she already gave signs of returning animation.

"The woman's all right," declared Clarkson. "Now let me see what that drunken brute's groaning about."

He walked toward the sitting-room, leaving Frank with the two women.

Yet in a minute there came such a strange, startled cry from his lips that the boy rushed involuntarily out to learn what it meant.

He saw Clarkson standing on the threshold, in an odd, strained attitude, gazing into the room. Frank hastened forward—but he stopped suddenly on coming near the door, for an ominous red stream was visible on the carpet within.

"What is it?" he cried in alarm.

"An accident," explained Mr. Clarkson, in a hasty desire to save himself from blame. "An accident; but a fatal one I fear. Look there."

Frank's eyes followed his pointing finger. There on the floor lay Mr. Walsh, his face as white as the wall, his form deathly still, while blood still gushed from a deep cut in his neck.

"Dead!" cried the boy in horror. "How is it? What did it?"

"That!" exclaimed Mr. Clarkson, pointing to the jagged fragments of the glass vessel which Alice had let fall. "He went down on that broken glass. One of the pieces has cut his jugular vein. Herbert Walsh has passed in his checks."

"Dead!" repeated the boy, shrinking back in involuntary terror.

"Dead," rejoined Clarkson.

There was a hardly-concealed satisfaction in his tone. Chance had come strangely to his aid in his dark purpose.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOARD OF THE MISER.

THE death of Herbert Walsh made a considerable sensation in New York. His miserly habits were well known, with the fact that he distrusted banks and kept his money hidden in some secret covert. This, with the strange manner of his death, gave occasion for extended newspaper comment.

That highly respectable citizen, John P. Clarkson, Esq., was closely questioned at the coroner's investigation, and gave a very clear and lucid account of his connection with the affair. He told feelingly how he had tried to break Walsh from his drinking habits, and how the accident had occurred from his endeavor to save Miss Walsh from the brutality of his drunken uncle.

Here, fortunately for him, he had witnesses. Alice Walsh confirmed part of the story, and Frank Melton the remainder, and the investiga-

tion ended much to the advantage of Mr. Clarkson, who posed as the virtuous defender of injured innocence against drunken vice.

"Death by accident," was the verdict of the coroner's jury, and the story of Herbert Walsh passed into oblivion, except in the minds of the few persons who were specially interested in his fate.

"Where had he hidden his money?" was a prominent question in the minds of these persons. "And to whom had he willed it?" was equally prominent.

The latter question was answered by Clarkson, on the day after the funeral, in the production of a will, duly signed and witnessed, in which the deceased left the bulk of his estate to his dear friend John P. Clarkson, with a legacy of two thousand dollars to his niece, Alice Walsh.

The witnesses to this will were Amos Jones and William Mason. The signature of Herbert Walsh was too marked to be in doubt.

The disinherited niece quite broke down under these tidings. She had hoped, in reward for the sacrifices she had made in living with her intemperate relative, that her future life would be well provided for. This unjust disposal of his property was, therefore, a severe shock to her.

"The worst of it is," she confided to her confidant, Frank Melton, "that he has left it to that man Clarkson. If it had been given to charity, I would never have complained. But, to be left to his worst enemy, and his destroyer!"

"You don't know all the underhand game that's been going on," remarked Frank.

"What underhand game?"

"I can tell you this much, anyhow. That will's a genuine document. I was there when it was signed, and know how much Clarkson paid for it."

"Paid for it?"

"Yes. I can't tell you the whole story just now, for I've been told to hold my tongue; but John P. Clarkson ain't going to handle your uncle's money; you can settle your mind on that. He's a very artful dodger, but I reckon he'll find himself dodged before he gets through."

"What do you mean, Frank? You talk in riddles."

"Then you best give this one up. I'm on his dodge, that's enough. I'm bound to upset his cart. That's all I can tell you just now, for I've been told I mustn't talk. But he won't handle that money, nary time!"

"You're on his dodge, and are going to upset his cart; that's all you can tell me. Well, I ought to be obliged for that valuable information. As for my uncle's money, I fear no one will handle it. His hiding-place will not be found easily."

"Won't it? You don't know John P. Clarkson! He'll take this house down brick by brick till he finds it."

"And what then? What am I to do?"

"You've got to wait, that's all. Leave that to me. I want him to find it. It'll be just so much trouble saved."

"If he finds it he will keep it."

"Will he? I reckon he might find a snag in his path. Just you mind this: Detective Frank is on the war-path, and he scents blood!"

"Oh, Detective Frank is on the war-path and scents blood! That puts quite another aspect on the situation. I'm quite convinced now. Clarkson don't dream what's in store for him!"

Frank listened in some perplexity to the quiet, grave air with which she said this. But, after a minute he broke into a fit of laughter.

"I'll open your eyes yet," he cried.

"I hope so. So far you have done your best to close them," she answered with a smile.

Frank really had better warrant for his confident assertions than he felt free to make public, yet. And one feature of his confidence, of which the reader is not yet aware, was that the document he had found in Artful Clarkson's slipper was Herbert Walsh's will, and that he was convinced that this was the paper for which the counterfeit notes had been paid.

That it was the purpose of the apparent heir to the estate to find the Walsh hoard and destroy those notes, Frank was convinced. The young detective therefore felt no little satisfaction when Mr. Clarkson took possession of the house which formed part of the inheritance, and brought him there as his aid and assistant.

There was no sign that the astute villain distrusted his hired boy, for his presence in that house at the time of Walsh's death. As for Amos Jones, he had been removed to his own home, so Frank's aid in nursing was no longer required.

When Clarkson moved into the house Alice Walsh moved out. The habitation that held

John P. Clarkson was not large enough to hold her. But by Frank's advice, she domiciled herself in the close neighborhood. She might be wanted at a minute's notice, he informed her.

Such was the condition of affairs three weeks after the death of Herbert Walsh. Meanwhile the detectives had taken no action in regard to Vanilli. They wished him to finish the work on which he was engaged, and content themselves with keeping a close watch upon him. They did not care to draw in their net till all the fish were in it.

It need not be said that the heir to the Walsh estate lost no time in his investigation. He had put the will on probate, and was full master of the situation, with no one to interfere with his actions.

As for Frank, there was but one loose thread in the web of his purposes. He had by no means forgotten the paper which Walsh had signed in his presence, and which he and the kitchen girl had witnessed. Where was that paper? and what was it?

Of the latter he had his theory. That it was a will, later than that under which Clarkson inherited, he felt no doubt. And he felt sure that the signing of the Clarkson will was a trick, to obtain the money offered.

"The Dodger didn't trust him," said Frank; "that's the reason he tried to poison old Walsh, before he could make another will."

What had become of this important paper? No trace of such a document had been found anywhere among Mr. Walsh's effects. Alice knew nothing of its disposal. The miser seemed to have got rid of it as mysteriously as of his money.

It was for this reason that Frank was highly satisfied to be made a party to the search for the hidden hoard. He had his own purpose—that of searching for the vanished document.

Neither search, however, seemed likely to come to a quick termination. It was not wanting in closeness. Mr. Clarkson proved himself an adept in the art of investigation, and his young assistant gave him satisfaction for his zeal and activity.

But more than a week passed by, and no trace of the concealed treasure was found.

The house was thoroughly searched from top to bottom. Its floors, walls and ceilings were examined with minute care, in search of a possible concealed hiding-place. The floor and walls of the cellar were closely investigated. The chimneys were searched. Every article of furniture large enough to have a concealed cavity was taken to pieces. Yet all in vain.

The outside walls of the house, the yard, even the fences, were exposed to the same close search. The result continued the same. No trace of the secret hoard was found.

As time went on Mr. Clarkson grew nervous and irritable. He began to fear that the fortune for which he had worked so vigilantly was about to escape him. Frank's position ceased to be an agreeable one. He was made the victim of much ill humor.

"It is here, somewhere," declared Mr. Clarkson, positively. "He was not the man that could keep long from his beloved hoard. If it had been hidden elsewhere, he would have made frequent journeys, which he did not."

"Do you know what's my notion?" asked Frank.

"Some nonsensical one, I suppose."

"Anyhow, it looks as if he didn't have no money, and as if we're hunting for something that don't exist."

"I thought so," cried Clarkson, angrily. "You always were a fool. Get out, now. I am tired of your nonsense."

"Get out," growled Frank, as he moved away from his nervously touchy employer. "I'm glad enough to get, for you're worse than a bear with a sore head. But where'll I get to. You're everywhere, except on the roof. I reckon I'd better make for that."

Frank did so, with a double purpose in his head. The thought of the roof reminded him that in this search the roof had been overlooked. Indeed, no one would have thought of this as a hiding-place for treasure. But all the probable hiding-places had been investigated. Why not try the improbable ones?

To think was to act with Frank Melton. A trap-door, reached by a short ladder, led to the roof. This he found to be of slate, with a considerable slope. He stood on the top round of the ladder, looking at it.

"Old Walsh never crawled round there," he said, shaking his head. "He'd broken his jolly neck if he'd tried it. If there's anything hid here, it must be within reach of the ladder, or of one of those side windows."

It had occurred to his mind that one or more of the slates might be movable, and have a cavity under it. He examined them one by one. They were all tightly nailed down. Frank shook his head thoughtfully.

Yet he was not the one to give it up so easily as this! Were those nails as firm as they looked? He felt them one by one with his fingers, to find if any of them would move.

After going nearly round the square of the trap-door, he was successful in finding some nails that moved under his touch. Whipping his jack-knife from his pocket, he inserted the blade under the head of one of these nails, and pried upward.

It yielded easily, and came out in his hand. He tried another, and with the same success. The business began to look encouraging. Several nails in adjoining slates yielded in the same way. After a few minutes four of the slates lay unfastened.

He now tried to move these, and found them to slip readily from their places in the roof. Scarcely a minute was needed to move the four slates, and to his surprise and delight there lay revealed to his eyes a cavity beneath where they had been.

An opening a foot square and several inches deep had been made here, and deftly covered with the slates removed. And in this opening lay a close black package, of waterproof material, completely filling it.

With an exclamation of delight the young investigator drew it out. Opening it carefully his delight increased. For a single glance sufficed to tell him that the package was made up of a closely condensed mass of bank notes, and that on top of it lay the sealed envelope he had so diligently sought.

His first movement was to consign the latter carefully to his pocket. The notes seemed of large denominations, and the total package to represent a very considerable sum of money.

But on top lay a thick layer of ten-dollar bills. "That's the stuff I'm after," cried the boy, with a chuckle of satisfaction. "Them's the Vanilli brand. I've got use for some of them chaps."

Taking possession of a considerable number of these bills, which he felt sure must be the counterfeits which Walsh had been paid for his signature to the will, Frank placed them in his pocket with the envelope.

Then carefully replacing the package of treasure in the curiously concealed cavity, he restored the slates to their places, inserted the nails in the holes from which he had drawn them, and left all as he had found it.

"If this ain't a jolly job of work, I won't talk," he said to himself as he descended the stairs. "Old Walsh was cute. And I've a big notion the Artful Dodger's sold. I've got business out of doors just now."

And avoiding Mr. Clarkson, he left the house, shutting the door noiselessly behind him.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SPRINGING OF THE TRAP.

Two hours passed before Frank Melton made his appearance again at the Walsh residence. During that time he had done some useful work, whose results will appear hereafter. On his return he found his employer seated in an easy-chair in the parlor, looking very much out of sorts.

"Where have you been, you lazy young rascal?" he angrily demanded. "How dare you absent yourself without permission?"

"Permission!" retorted Frank. "Didn't you tell me to get out? Well, I got out. Isn't that obeying orders?"

"See here. You'll get out for good if you try your smartness on me, young man."

"Who's done the best work? You sitting here, or me walking out there?" queried Frank. "I bet you high, if it's put to vote, I'll come out head."

"What do you mean? What have you done?" "I've been keeping up a big think, that's all. You and me have gone over every part of this house but one, Mr. Clarkson. My thinking machine says that we ought to try that one."

"That one? What one?" demanded Mr. Clarkson, looking up with interest. "What do you mean, boy? What place have we left untried?"

"The roof."

"The roof?" There was disappointment in his tone. "That's all confounded nonsense. How could anybody make a hiding-place on the roof?"

"I don't know," answered Frank indifferently. "The notion came into my head, and I let it out; that's all."

"The roof? Nonsense!" Mr. Clarkson threw himself back in his chair, and rocked energetically. Then he suddenly started up. "Come," he said, "we'll try the roof." A fool talks wisdom sometimes.

"And a wise man plays the fool," said Frank to himself, as he followed his energetic employer.

Mr. Clarkson led the way to the upper story of the house, and examined the roof from the dormer windows.

"Your idea won't work, boy," he said. "These slates are nailed on to boards, and the boards run the whole length of the roof. It is impossible to hide anything here."

"Isn't that just where a cute old coon like miser Walsh'd hide his money?" queried Frank. "Where it's impossible is just the place for him."

"By Jove, boy, you're not quite such a fool as I thought."

"If you buy me for a fool you're going to get awfully left," rejoined Frank.

Mr. Clarkson seated himself on the window-sill, with his eyes fixed on the roof, thinking over the possibilities. Meanwhile Frank sought the lower portion of the house, where some mysterious events took place.

Then the boy made his way to the trap-door, and threw it open.

"Frank," came in the voice of Mr. Clarkson.

"Sir," answered the boy.

"Come here. There's nothing in your idea. There is no possible hiding-place on or under this roof."

"Don't you take too much stock in that," answered Frank, with a show of excitement in his voice. "Come here. I've struck something."

Mr. Clarkson, with a smile of doubt, sought the ladder, and mounted it to Frank's side.

"Well?" he asked. "Where's your mare's nest now?"

"See here," said Frank, excitedly. "Some of these nails are loose. He moved the heads with his fingers to show. 'If they were taken out the slates could be moved; and then—'"

"We'd see the boards under them," responded Mr. Clarkson. "But I'll try. There are always chances. Make way, boy, we're crowded here."

Frank descended the ladder, and waited curiously for the explosion of delight which he expected.

He could hear the scraping sounds above as Mr. Clarkson pried out the nails. Then came a scrape of a different kind as the slates were moved. Finally he heard what he waited for.

"By Jove!" came in sharp and excited accents. "What's this? Why, hang it all, I believe the boy has hit it! Well, by thunder, here is a queer hiding-place!"

"Have you found anything?" demanded Frank.

"Nothing of importance," rejoined Mr. Clarkson, in a voice whose excitement was suddenly repressed. "Only a hole stuffed with old paper. I thought I had a big find, but there's nothing in it."

"That's awkward," rejoined Frank. "I thought you'd struck oil."

"Only water," rejoined Mr. Clarkson.

Frank could hear him replacing the slates. He waited below with a knowing smile on his face. After a minute or two Mr. Clarkson came down the ladder. He held nothing in his hands, and showed no evidence of having anything about his person.

"It proved a mare's nest, as I feared," he remarked. "Only a bunch of old papers, with which the slaters had filled up a hole. That's the kind of house work men do nowadays. There's rascality everywhere. By the way, you've given me a new idea. I'm going to move the sideboard in the dining-room and take up the floor under it. I want you to go to my house in Bronson street, and bring me the package of tools you will find on the desk in my office."

"Right away?" asked Frank.

"Yes. And don't be a month on the way."

"All right," rejoined the boy. "I'll be here in an hour. Queer you didn't think of that place before."

"Just so. It's the only place left. Now be off."

Down-stairs Frank went, two steps at a time, as if in great haste. Not a minute passed before the front door was heard to slam loudly. A meaning smile came upon Mr. Clarkson's face.

"I've got rid of that young ferret," he said. "The boy is sharper than I gave him credit for. It's lucky he suspects nothing. By Jove, though, I must pay him handsomely for his idea. The money's mine, and old Walsh is discounted."

He ascended the ladder again as he spoke, and when he again came down bore with him the package which Frank had already investigated.

There was a look of infinite satisfaction on Mr. Clarkson's face as he made his way down-stairs to the dining-room. He failed to hear certain low sounds in the front of the house.

"Two thousand for Alice. I had to do something for the poor girl," He laughed in saying this. "And an even divide with Jones and Mason. Yes, it will be an even divide—after I've had my dividends." He laughed still more meaningly.

Reaching the dining-room, he laid the black-covered bundle on the table, and opened it, revealing its valuable contents.

"As I thought," he exclaimed, in a tone of the deepest satisfaction. "Here is the pile of bogus tens. I knew he would not issue them. Well, they'll make good fire-wood. We can print more if we need them."

He gathered up the bundle of counterfeits, and without counting them carried them to the kitchen. There was a hot fire in the range, and into this he thrust the notes, a handful at a time, looking on with great relief as he watched the curling flames.

"It's ugly stuff to keep," he remarked. "It has done its work, and this is the best use for it."

At this critical instant a heavy hand fell on his shoulder, and another hand seized the notes still remaining in his grasp.

"I know a better use for it," spoke a voice in his ear, and the bogus money was torn with a quick jerk from his hand.

"Who in the fiend's name is this?" cried Clarkson, turning suddenly, with a look of surprise and fury.

He found himself face to face with two resolute-looking men, one of whom still kept a firm hold on his shoulder.

"My name is Richard Wister, at your service," spoke a mocking voice. "This gentleman is called Joseph Smith. We have been for some time on the track of a gentleman called the Artful Dodger, and fancy we have about run that fox to his hole."

Clarkson's face grew very pale. Then it flushed with anger, and he threw the hand sharply from his shoulder and struck a quick, hard blow at the detective.

Dick Wister started back to avoid this. But for the moment he was thrown off his guard. Before he could recover, Clarkson had sprung forward, torn the bundle of notes from his hand, and thrust them in upon the red coals, where they instantly burst into a blaze.

"I'm doing this job, gentlemen," he cried, hoarsely. "Stand back, or by heaven, I'll bore a hole through you."

And the steel barrel of a revolver glittered ominously in the fire-light.

The two detectives stepped back hastily, and stood facing the resolute man, with no attempt to draw a weapon in return. Meanwhile, the curling flames licked up the notes.

"Now, my sharp friends, if you have no other business, and are ready to take a wise man's warning, you'll get out of this house," declared Clarkson, with a smile of triumph. "You were on me, were you? I judge I'm on you, now. This house, and all that's in it, are mine by will. The law gives me the right to defend my house. Vamoose, you rascals, or I'll treat you as burglars!"

"You seem to have struck a paying vein," remarked Dick, quietly, "to judge by the pile of bank notes on the table, yonder."

"Ha!—Have you touched that?"

Clarkson dashed into the dining-room, and stood with his back to the table, where lay the heap of notes. He still held the pistol threateningly.

"You'd best drop that little instrument," rejoined Joe. "We are officers of the law, and intend to proceed legally."

"Proceed? What proceedings remain, except to vacate my house? That I'll give you but five minutes to do."

"Your house? your money? What claim have you to them?"

"I claim them under Herbert Walsh's will, now on probate."

"Of what date?"

"May 10th."

"I fear your claims won't hold good. Miss Walsh, will you please give me that document?"

Clarkson's eyes turned sharply and uneasily at this, and his face paled again as he saw Alice Walsh enter the room, a folded paper in her hand. The villain, despite his bravado, was beginning to feel very much like a wolf at bay.

from her hand, and
Clarkson," he said,
not inherit under that
later will, dated May
year, and leaving all the
this young lady. I doubt if
this as your house and castle."

"By all that's foul, it's a forgery!" cried
Clarkson, in deep excitement.

"Hardly, my dear sir. I fancy this will
stand as Herbert Walsh's signature. And it is
duly witnessed."

"By whom?"

"Frank Melton and Mary O'Reilly."

"Frank Melton!" At that instant Clarkson's
roving eye caught sight of the face of Frank,
who was peering in from the hall. An instant
suspicion sprang into his face, followed by the
expression of a fury.

"You here? You?" he hissed in wild accents.
"Traitor! You have done this! Take your
pay, then!"

And hastily turning his arm, the crack of a
pistol-shot rung sharply through the room, as he
aimed point-blank at the boy, and fired.

Frank's face suddenly vanished. Alice
screamed in terror. The two detectives, with
oaths of rage, threw themselves on the desper-
ate man, Dick striking his wrist a blow that
hurled the revolver to the floor, while Joe seized
his other arm.

"Wretch! Murderer!" cried Dick. "You
are not satisfied with a lock-up. You want to
stretch hemp, do you?"

"Not quite a murderer," responded a cool
voice from the hall, and Frank walked un-
harmful into the room. "I dodged that bullet
at the flash, but I don't want any more of that
sort of bugs flying round my cranium."

"There will be no more," remarked Dick, as
he slipped a pair of handcuffs on Clarkson's
wrists, despite his struggles. "You've got to
the end of your rope, John Clarkson. You've
been a mighty cute hand, and have fooled us for
years; but this time you've put your foot in it."

"You rascals!" cried Clarkson, with a great
show of indignation. "Take off these things, or
I'll make you sweat for it! Why do you assault
me? For burning up what was left me by will?
Who questions my right to do that?"

"Making counterfeit notes is an ugly business,
John Clarkson."

"How will you prove them to be counter-
feits?" asked Clarkson triumphantly.

"By very good evidence, my dear sir. In
the first place, our young friend here found the
miser's hoard before you did, and was smart
enough to take from it this last will and testa-
ment, and a goodly batch of those counterfeit
notes. So your burn won't do you much good."

Clarkson fixed his eyes on Frank's face with a
deadly hatred.

"Well," he broke out, with a new expression,
"what have I do with all this? If Walsh put
counterfeit notes in his bundle I am not respon-
sible."

"Only that we have evidence that you paid
him with these notes for the making of that
will. He was sharp enough to take your money
and make a later will, though you tried to hin-
der him by poison."

Clarkson groaned, and sunk into a chair be-
hind him.

"That's not all, my sharp friend. We've got
your pal Vanilli in our clutches, with the old
counterfeit plate, and the new one he was
making. And we know where to lay our hands
on your other pals. You have played the Art-
ful Dodger well, old fellow, but it's played out.
We've got our work in at last."

"That boy! I'll murder him yet!"

After these words, which were uttered in a
hiss of concentrated rage, Clarkson's face fell
heavily on his hands, and he seemed suddenly
to collapse.

"He throws up the sponge," said Dick. "Let
us take him out. Miss Walsh, we leave you in
possession of your property."

That night John P. Clarkson slept in a prison
cell. Vanilli, the engraver, occupied another
cell in the same prison.

On the next day Herbert Walsh's last will
was put on probate, the signature being attested
by the witnesses, and the strange circumstances
of its finding described.

A count of the treasure-trove proved the
young lady to be heiress to fully seventy-five
thousand dollars in cash, together with the house
and lot in which these events had taken place.
She was well repaid for her long martyrdom to a
drunken uncle.

What took place afterward may be told very
briefly. The crime of counterfeiting was clear-

ly proved on Clarkson and Vanilli, and they
were each sentenced to ten years' imprisonment,
with hard labor.

As regarded their confederates, there was no
convincing evidence that they had taken any
part in the actual work of counterfeiting, but
their guilty connection with the Walsh affair
brought them each a sentence of five years.

The honor of all this exposure was generously
given by the detectives to their young assistant,
Frank Melton, through whose skill and intelli-
gence they had been enabled to run the Artful
Dodger to his hole, after having been so long
baffled by him.

Frank, modest under his honors, declared that
he owed all his success to their advice, and that
he deserved no credit but that of being a good
apprentice.

In later years, however, he blossomed out into
a highly promising young detective, performing
many skillful bits of detective work, some of
which we may hereafter describe.

And his friendship for Alice Walsh ripened
into a genuine boyish love, which she was not in-
disposed to return.

Her house became almost a home to Frank,
and the wealth which she owed to his useful as-
sistance she insisted he should share.

Their friends say, indeed, that the two will
yet become man and wife, and it certainly
looks that way. But that is an affair of the
future, and with the future we have nothing to
do.

We leave them, therefore, to time and destiny.
THE END.

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